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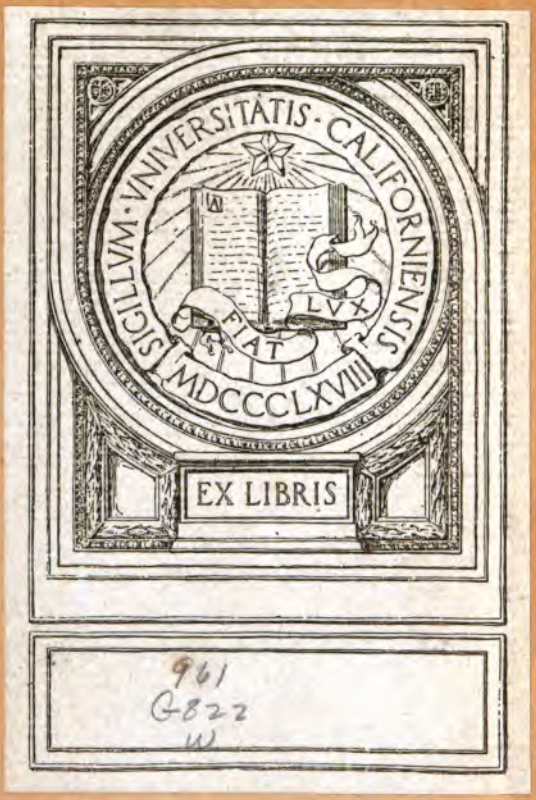
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WOLF BREED

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SHE STOOD UPON A MONSTER BEAR SKIN. UPON THE RUG, STREWN ABOUT HER CARELESSLY, THEIR BRIGHT DISCS ADANCE WITH REFLECTED LIGHT, A THOUSAND MINTED GOLD PIECES CAUGHT THE GLINT OF THE LOW SUN *(Page 268)*

WOLF BREED

BY

JACKSON GREGORY

AUTHOR OF "THE OUTLAW," "UNDER HANDICAP,"
"THE SHORT CUT"

WITH FRONTISPIECE IN COLOR BY
FRANK TENNEY JOHNSON

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1917

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TO
JACKSON GREGORY, JR.

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WOLF BREED

CHAPTER I

OPEN HOUSE AT PÈRE MARQUETTE'S

MID June, and the eager spring had burst triumphant into the North Woods. The mountain tops, still white hostages of the retreating winter, fettered in frozen manacles, were alone in their reminiscence of the implacable season. And even they made their joyous offerings to the newborn springtime, pouring a thousand flashing cascades to leap down the rocky sides and seek out the hidden nooks and valleys where seeds were bursting and the thawed earth lay fruitful under warm, lush grass. The birds were back from their southern voyaging, once more the squirrels chattered in the open, noisily forgetful of the rigours of winter in the joy of green things growing, and in the clear blue arch of the sky the sun wheeled gloriously through a long day. The air, always wine, was now a sparkling, bub-

bling, rare vintage champagne, dancing in the blood, making laughter in the heart and sweet tumult in the brain. It was the season of long, golden days, of clear, silver nights, of budding life everywhere.

Because of three unmistakable signs did even the most sceptical of the handful of hardy spirits at MacLeod's Settlement know that in truth the spring had come. They read the welcome tidings in the slipping of the snows from the flinty fronts of Ironhead and Indian Peak a thousand feet above the greening valley; in the riotous din of squirrels and birds interwoven with the booming of frogs from the still ponds; and finally in the announcement tacked upon the post-office door. The two line scrawl in lead pencil did not state in so many words the same tidings which the blue birds were proclaiming from the thicket on the far bank of the Little MacLeod; it merely announced that to-night Père Marquette and his beloved wife, Mère Jeanne, were keeping open house. Every one in the Settlement knew what that meant, just as well as he understood the significance of the noises of the ice splitting upon the ponds.

Once every year until now this was the fiftieth had such an announcement appeared. Not always upon the door of the post-office, for when the announcements began there was no post-office in

MacLeod's Settlement. But annually at the chosen time set apart by the season and himself Père Marquette would appear upon the little narrow street, earlier than the earliest, cock his bright eye up at old Ironhead towering high above him, rub his chin complacently, turn his head sidewise so that he might hearken to the thin voices of the wild creatures, and then, his message tacked up, return to the private room behind his store to kiss Mère Jeanne awake and inform her with grave joy that their *"jour de l'an"* had come to them. Then, and with much frolicking and wine and music, would their new year begin.

"It is our anniversary, *m'sieu'*," he would say with an air of vast confidence to the first man he met upon the street. "To-night we keep open house here." He would wave his hand toward the long, low log building, clay chinked. "We will be proud of your presence and that of your frien's."

It had been remarked that the anniversary had come one year upon the twenty-sixth of May, another year as late as the last of June. Père Marquette had laughed softly and had shaken his head. "What matter?" he had demanded. "I, I marry myself with my beloved Mam'selle Jeanne the first fine day of spring. *Voilà.*"

The central door of the Marquette house, broadest and heaviest and most conspicuous both

from its position in the middle of its valiant line of brothers, had been closed and barred since last night. It gave entrance to the store; here behind his long counter, peering over boxes neatly piled or between great heaps of bacon and tobacco and men's clothing, Père Marquette looked out upon the world some three hundred and sixty-four days of the ordinary year. But upon the first day of spring it was closed and locked until noon. If a man needed plug cut for his pipe, why then let him borrow from his friend or steal from his enemy; it was no concern of Père Marquette. If a woman required flour for her baking let her do without; it would serve her right for having failed to remember the great day. . . . Then at high noon, not measured by any ticking clock in the Settlement, the matter being decided by Père Marquette and the sun alone, the middle door was flung open. The old man, dressed in his best black suit, his newest skull cap set like a crown upon his head, stood at one side of the entrance, gravely courteous, his black eyes twinkling, twin withered roses in his old cheeks. Mère Jeanne, silver buckles on her shoes, her ample form surrounded almost but not quite by a great white, stiff-starched apron, a bouquet of flowers in one hand, took her place at the other side. And then the guests began to arrive.

You could list the men, women, children and

four footed live stock of MacLeod's Settlement upon a printed page and still have room left for a brief biography of each. They all came, all dressed in their best holiday raiment, all happy and eager for the celebration. From far down the Little MacLeod river men trod the slushy trails, rough fellows for the most part and silent, but with a tongue in each head to propose a toast to host and hostess. From over the ridge, from French Valley, from as far east as St. Croix and as far west as Dunvegan's Post, the guests trooped in. Miners, trappers, little stock men; scions of old French families with grand names, descendants of younger English sons with riotous blood, Americans who had crossed the border with much haste and scant baggage; many men whom the world had outlawed and whom the North Woods had accepted as empire builders; men of pure blood knocking elbows with swarthy "breeds," oddly alike in the matters of keenly alert eyes and magnificent bodies.

As they filed through the Frenchman's door they entered not the store at all but what was Père Marquette's idea of a drawing room. The long counters and shelves were there, but the barrels of pickled meat, the piles of soap and tinned meats, the bags of flour, the stacks of men's clothing, all this had been whisked away and out of sight as though by magic. A strip of new red

oilcloth upon one counter, a strip of blue upon another, transformed both into auxiliary seats. Benches, recently brought in from the rear storeroom by Père Marquette's man, Jules, and freshly dusted by him, lined the walls. Even Mère Jeanne's bedroom had been robbed of chairs; boxes dressed gaily in gingham or perchance even flaunting remnants of chintz, were amply good enough for the boys and girls.

"My frien', you do me the honour," said Père Marquette over and over as some stranger upon whom his quick black eyes had never rested until now accepted his hand and entered to be again welcomed by Mère Jeanne. "You make mamma and me ver' happy."

Let the frontier push out as far and as fast as it pleases, the violin always goes with it. Men march the more intrepidly to the scraping of the skilful bow. There were two fiddles already going in the next room; Père Marquette had seen to that. And in the same room stood a great, sturdy homemade table, crippled in one leg, yet standing valiantly, like an old soldier home from the wars. Mère Jeanne's own plump hands had placed the best tablecloth upon it, and there, in its nest of field flowers, was the great bowl which had been the most serviceable of the handful of wedding gifts fifty years ago. Since the crisp sting had not yet gone out of the air the high red tide in

the bowl was steaming an invitation which was irresistible.

Long before one o'clock all of the Settlement had arrived, each one had had his bit of the heady punch, small glasses for the women, great pewter mugs many times refilled for the men. The big bowl was proverbially like the purse of Fortunatus in its scorn of emptiness. Mère Jeanne ceremoniously replenished it time and again, carried brimming cups to the fiddlers, and the merry music, having ceased just long enough for the musicians to gulp down "Your health," went on more inspiringly than before. Heavy booted feet, moving rythmically, made the dance a thing to hear as well as see, deep throated laughter boomed out incessantly, the lighter, fewer voices of women weaving in and out of the clamour.

All afternoon men came in, now and then a woman with them. They drank and ate, they smoked Père Marquette's tobacco from the jars set about everywhere, they traded old news for new and new for old, they speculated upon the coming thaws and trapping to be found down on the Little MacLeod and up towards the Silver Lake country, they told of the latest gold strike in the Black Bear hills and predicted fresh strikes to be made before the thaw was ten days old. Many types of men and women, some no doubt good, some bad no doubt, all mingling freely.

At five o'clock Père Marquette cleared his voice, scrambled with rare agility upon one of his own counters and made the expected announcement:

"Ah, my frien's, you make us ver' happy, me an' Mamma Jeanne. We wish our leetle house she was more big to-day, big like our heart, that she can hold the whole worl'." He hugged his thin old arms to his breast and smiled upon them. "To-night, all night long, *mes amis,* you are welcome. The doors of Père Marquette have forgot how to close up to-night! But listen, one instant! Jus' across the road my warehouse she is open. The violins have gone there. There you may dance, dance as Mam'selle Jeanne an' I dance it is fifty year to-night. Dance all night long. And while the yo'ng folk whose hearts are in their heels walse yonder, here we older ones . . . Ah!" as sudden voices, cheering, cut into his running words. "You have not forgot, eh?"

It was the signal for division. The few women who had children took them home with them; the other women, young and old, following like a holiday flotilla in the wake of Mère Jeanne, tacked through the muck of the road to the warehouse; many of the younger and some few of the older men followed them; and in the house of Père Marquette, in the yellow light of a half dozen kerosene lamps and many tall candles, the real affair of the evening began.

Great logs oozing molten pitch were burning noisily in the two rock fireplaces, the red flames swept up into the blackened chimneys to spread cheer within and to scatter sparks like little stars in the clear night without, the punch bowl had at last been allowed to stand empty not because men were through drinking but because stronger drink, men's drink, had appeared in many bottles upon the shelves, a game of poker was running in one corner of a room, a game of solo in another; yonder, seen through an open door, six men were shaking dice and wagering little and bigger sums recklessly; a little fellow with a wooden leg and a terribly scarred face was drawing shrieking rag time from an old and asthmatic accordion while four men, their big boots clumping noisily upon the bare floor, danced like awkward trained bears when the outer door, closed against the chill of the evening, was flung open and a stranger to MacLeod's settlement stood a moment framed against the outside night. A score of eyes, going to him swiftly, studied him with unhidden curiosity.

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF NO-LUCK DRENNEN

ALL sorts and conditions of men come to the North Woods; some because they want to, some because they have to. Some because they are drawn by the fine lure of adventure and the urge of the restless spirit, some because they are driven by that bloodhound which is the law. All types, all classes. And yet now, standing jauntily upon Père Marquette's threshold, was a type of which as yet the Settlement had had no knowledge.

He was young and wore his black mustaches with all of the fierceness of youth. His boots were at once the finest and the smallest which MacLeod's had ever seen upon a man's feet. He wore gloves, and when in due time the hands came out of the gloves, they were little like a woman's and white and soft. He was a handsome young devil-of-a-fellow with all of the soft, graceful beauty of the far southland. His mouth, smiling now, was red lipped, his teeth a glistening white. Eyes very big, very black, very soft, very tender, smiling too. From the crown of his wide black hat to the

tall heels of his dainty boots he was such a dandy as demanded more than a casual glance.

"Amigos," he cried, the door closed now, his back to it, his wide hat describing a slow, graceful arc as he raised it gallantly from his black hair, "I have the thirst of a lost soul. Who will drink with me?"

He whipped the glove from his right hand, caught his hat under his arm and brought from his pocket a shining gold piece which he tossed to one of Père Marquette's counters. A few of the men laughed, seeing his mistake, while others murmured, "Dago," a little disgustedly and returned their attention to their drink, gaming or talk. Père Marquette came forward briskly.

"M'sieu," he said graciously, offering his hand, "your presence honours Mamma Jeanne an' me. We are to-night fifty year marry . . . you shall put your money in your pocket, m'sieu. One does not pay to drink at the place of Père Marquette to-night."

The young fellow looked at him in surprise, then turned wondering eyes about him, even peering through the open door into the further rooms as though asking himself what manner of place was this where men drank and did not pay. Then he laughed softly.

"Your pardon, señor," he said politely, taking the old man's proffered hand and bending over it

gracefully. "Outside I was athirst like a man in hell . . ."

A queer change came over his smiling face as his eyes, journeying beyond the thin, black coated figure of Père Marquette, rested upon a secluded corner of the room where in the nook by the fireplace a quiet game of cards was in progress.

"Señorita! Señorita!" he cried softly, pushing by Père Marquette and coming forward swiftly. "*Dispensame!* Forgive me, señorita!"

It was Ernestine, the one woman remaining in the room, Ernestine Dumont, who had come from over the ridge with big Kootanie George, her latest lover. She was sitting close to Kootanie's side now, whispering occasionally in his ear as a hand was dealt him, for the most part contentedly sipping at her little glass of sweet wine as she sat back and watched. She, with the others, had turned toward the entrant, her eyes remaining upon him until now. She smiled, no doubt pleased at his notice, while Kootanie George, wide-shouldered, mighty limbed, the biggest man within a hundred miles of the Settlement, glared at him in frowning wonder.

"Forgive you?" laughed Ernestine, after a quick glance at George upon whose shoulder she laid her hand lightly. "What for?"

"I did not know that a lady was here," explained the young fellow eagerly. He was almost

standing over her, his eyes for her alone as he turned up his mustaches more fiercely yet and his eyes grew the more tender. "I speak roughly and not guarding my tongue which should suffer and not taste wine for a week, señorita. I am ashamed."

Ernestine blushed; again several men had laughed. He had said "hell" and had apologised to her . . .

"We'll let it go this time," she laughed a trifle awkwardly. "And as for not drinking anything. . . . Look out or you'll spill what Papa Marquette is bringing you now."

"We are all frien's, m'sieu," said Papa Marquette courteously, offering a brimming glass. "You, too. And it is wrong that one should thirst to-night."

The other took the glass with another of his graceful bows.

"May you have other fifty years of happiness with your señora," he said warmly. "Your health and her health, señor." The glass, at his lips, halted and came away for a moment while he thought to introduce himself. "I am Ramon Garcia."

He said it as one might have said, "I am the King of Spain." Simply enough but with a proud simplicity. Then he put back his head and drank.

After that Ramon Garcia needed no coaxing to

remain. He fitted into the throng as he seemed to do all things, gracefully. Since he could not spend his money to-night for wine and since spend it he must he ventured it pleasantly at the table where the dice rolled. Between throws he made many slender cigarettes of fine tobacco and thin white papers; winning, he forgot to note how much in turning his eyes with tender admiration upon Ernestine Dumont, whose glance more than once met his; losing, he hummed languid snatches of Mexican love songs in a remarkably pure tenor voice.

Before he had been with them an hour it was evident to many, not last of all to big Kootanie George, that the "Mex" was flirting openly with the yellow haired Ernestine. It was equally evident that his notice did not embarrass her as his apology had done. She curved her red lips at him when George was not looking, she glanced down as demure as a bashful school girl when her big lover was watching her. George began to lose at his cards and when he swore at his luck did not apologise.

At last Ramon Garcia wearied of the dice. He pocketed his winnings and pushed back his chair. A guitar in its case in a corner of the room had caught his roving eye. Standing with his back to the wall, leaning indolently, he sent his white fingers wandering across the strings and his eyes

drifting back to find those of Ernestine Dumont. Then through the discordance of other voices, of clicking chips, rustling cards, dice snapped down upon the hard table tops, chink of glass and bottle neck, the voice of Ramon Garcia, liberated softly, filled the room with its richness as a room is filled with the perfume of flowers. Such music as he made did not often come into the North Woods, and men . . . and one woman . . . listened.

He sang it in the Spanish, a tongue which no other man here understood. Yet they must all guess the meaning of the words. They were love words, tenderly lilted. And they were being sung to Ernestine Dumont. There was a little smile upon young Ramon's lips, a hint of gay laughter in his voice and in his soft eyes a deal of love making. Kootanie George scowled, Ernestine twirled her glass in her fingers, one or two men laughed.

When he had done Ramon Garcia swept his fingers across the strings in a sort of mournful regret. Then, when there was a sudden clapping of hands, he bowed, smiled and sang again, this time putting the words of his little song, the same song, into English:

"The perfume of roses, of little red roses;
(Thou art a rose, oh, so sweet, *corazón!*)
The laugh of the water who falls in the fountain;
(Thou art the fountain of love, *corazón!*)

The brightness of stars, of little stars golden;
(*Estrella de mi vida!* My little life star!)
The shine of the moon through the magnolia tree;
I am so sad till thou come, *mi amor!*
Dios! It is sweet to be young and to love!
More sweet than wine . . . to be young and to love!"

In the clapping of hands which broke out when he had done Ernestine's was to be heard above Kootanie George's grunt of disgust.

"No man talk, that," he snorted, careless of who heard. "Dam' slush."

"Your deal, Koot," laughed Blunt Rand, the American trapper from the headwaters of the Little MacLeod. "Don't let the Mexican gent spoil your play that-away. Deal 'em up, why don't you?"

Kootanie George glared at Rand and gathered in the cards. He understood as did Ernestine and the others at the table the gibe which lay under Rand's words. The American's fancies, too, had run toward Ernestine Dumont not so long ago, and she had not deigned to take notice of him after the coming of Kootanie.

"Mexican gent, huh?" said George slowly. "If you mean Greaser why don't you say Greaser?"

Ramon Garcia had again approached the table. He stopped suddenly as George's snarl came to him, and his white teeth showed for a quick flash under his lifted lip. Then, his eyes smiling darkly,

he came on again, bending intimately over Ernestine's chair.

"They are dancing over there," he said softly. "Will you dance with me, señorita?"

George merely looked at them sidewise. Ernestine glanced up sharply and for a moment indecision stood easily readable in her eyes. Then she shook her head.

"Not now," she said quietly. "Maybe after a while. I don't know. Anyway not now."

"*Gracias,* señorita." He thanked her quite as though she had taken his proffered arm. And turning away he went back to the game of dice and his wine glass. Kootanie laughed.

"Better look out for him, Koot," grinned Blunt Rand. "Them kind carry cold steel sharp on both edges. They get it between your shoulder blades and then twist it. It's awful uncomfortable."

Rand had drunk his share of toasts to the eternal joy of the Marquettes and the drinking had given to his tongue a wee bit of recklessness, to his heart a little venom. Out of a clear sky, his words falling crisply through the little silence, he demanded of no one in particular and in all seeming innocence:

"What's happened to No-luck Drennen? I ain't seen him here of late."

Kootanie George turned his head slowly and

stared at him. Rand was fingering his cards, his eyes hastily busied with their corners. George turned from him to Ernestine. She bit her lips and a spurt of red leaped up into her cheeks. Her eyes met his a moment, steely and hard. Then they went to Blunt Rand, as bright and hateful as twin daggers.

The man upon Rand's right started to laugh. He altered his mind as Kootanie George's eyes turned slowly upon him and changed the laugh to a cough behind his hand. Nobody offered to answer the question; it was accepted as one of those utterances put into the form of an interrogation merely for rhetorical reasons and requiring no reply. For it was common talk through the camps that No-luck Drennen had done the impossible and gotten blood from a turnip; in other words that he had drawn love out of the heart of Ernestine Dumont. And it was known that the miracle had been a twin wonder in that Drennen had refused to see and when he had at last seen had refused to accept. Ernestine's love had been like Ernestine herself, reckless. And, yes, Drennen had laughed at her. He had told her brutally that he had no more use for a woman in his life than he had for a cat. Certainly not for a woman like her. His words had been given after Drennen's fashion; like a slap in the face. All this had been less than a year ago.

Elated at the success with which his words had met, Blunt Rand laughed. Again Kootanie George looked at him steadily.

"What are you lookin' for Drennen for?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, nothin'," rejoined the other lightly. "Only when I come through Little Smoky the other day an ol' flame of his asked about him. The Fire Bird they call her. Know her?"

Ernestine Dumont's face grew a shade redder in its mortification even while she knew that the man was lying to tease her. Then she sat back with a little gasp and even slow moving Kootanie George turned quickly as a heavy voice called from the door:

"You're a liar, Blunt Rand."

It was No-luck Drennen just come in and standing now, his hat far back upon his head, his hands upon his hips, staring across the room at Blunt Rand.

CHAPTER III

THE MAN UNDER THE CLOAK

DAVE DRENNEN was a big man, no man here so big save Kootanie George alone, who was two inches the taller and fully thirty pounds the heavier. The Canadian stood four inches better than six feet in his squat, low-heeled boots and must turn sideways to get his massive shoulders through most doors hereabouts. Unlike most very tall men George carried himself straight, his enormous chest thrust forward.

Drennen was younger by half a dozen years, slenderer, of cleaner build. Any man at Père Marquette's would have emptied his pockets that night to witness a fight between the two. Men as a rule liked Kootanie George, slow moving, slow spoken, heavily good humoured. And as an even more unbroken rule they disliked Dave Drennen. Throughout the far places of the great northwest into which of recent years he had fitted restlessly he was known as a man at once too silent and too quarrelsome. He trod his own trail alone. Other men had "pardners"; Drennen was no

man's friend. He was hard and he was bitter. Not yet at the end of his first score and ten, his mouth had grown set in stern, harsh lines, his heavy brows had acquired the habit of bunching ominously over eyes in which was the glint of steel. He was a man whose smile was unpleasant, whose laugh could be as ugly as many a man's curse.

It looked like a quarrel between No-luck Drennen and Blunt Rand. And yet the men who ceased their playing at the snap of his voice forgot Rand and hungered for trouble between Drennen and Kootanie George. Rand had been measured long ago and didn't count. He blabbed big words when he was drunk and whined when a man struck him. He would swallow his words now and swallow with them No-luck Drennen's vicious "You're a liar, Blunt Rand." Even if Drennen slapped his face he would merely crawl away like a little bug, spitting venom.

Drennen was standing ten feet from him and made no move to draw closer.

"Did you hear me, Rand?" he demanded sharply.

"I heard you," grumbled the trapper. "What's eatin' you, Dave, anyway?"

"Tell them you lied."

Rand flushed, and inspired by his liquor a sudden, unusual stubbornness sprang up in his eyes. He heard Ernestine laugh softly.

"You go to hell," he cried hotly. "I got a right . . ."

"No man has a right to lie about me," announced Drennen crisply. The big hands at his sides had clenched swiftly with knotting muscles. At last he took a quick step forward, his quarrelsome mood riding him. "If you don't want me to choke the tongue out of your head tell them you lied."

"Messieurs, messieurs," cried poor old Marquette imploringly. "For the love of God! To-night all mus' be gay, all mus' be frien's. It is the night Mamma Jeanne an' me we are marry fifty year . . ."

Drennen snarled at him, shaking the thin old hand away angrily. Rand was upon his feet, some of the stubbornness already fled from his eyes, the sound of Ernestine Dumont's taunting laugh lost to him in the harsh voice of Drennen.

"I don't want no trouble to-night, Dave," he said swiftly. "It's old Papa Marquette's weddin' night. I . . . I was jus' joshin', Dave." And then as Ernestine laughed again, he spat out, "Jus' joshin' to tease Ernestine here."

"Sangre de dios!" murmured Ramon Garcia gently, his black eyes liquid fire. "He is a little coward, that Rand."

Hardly more than a whisper and Garcia quite across the room from Rand. And yet the still-

ness was so perfect that Rand heard and jerked his head up, swinging toward the Mexican.

"You little Greaser!" he cried shrilly. "You dirty breed, you!" He pushed through the crowd to Garcia's table. "Coward, am I? I'll show you."

Ramon Garcia's laughter greeting the hot words was a clear burst of unaffected, boyish merriment. He tilted his chair back against the wall and turned a delighted face up to Rand's flushed one.

"Señor," he chided softly, shaking a slender white finger very close to Rand's nose, "have you forgot it is the gala night of our good host, the Papa Français? That you don't care for trouble to-night? *Mama mia!* You are a comic, no?"

Then bringing his hand away and hooking both thumbs impudently into the armholes of his gay vest the Mexican smiled as he hummed softly, glancing away briefly to where Ernestine Dumont was watching them:

"The perfume of roses, of little red roses;
(Thou art a rose, oh, so sweet, *corazón!*)"

With men laughing at him Blunt Rand struck. The young Mexican was still in his chair. Like a cat he slipped from it now, avoiding the heavy,

swinging blow, moving to one side with swift gracefulness, standing with the table between him and Rand. As he moved his right hand slid into his pocket.

"You dago!" Rand shouted at him, lunging forward while men scrambled out of the way. "Call me coward an' then go for your knife! Fight with your hands, damn you."

Again Garcia avoided him easily, calm and quick eyed, offering pantherine swiftness against the blind fury of Rand.

"*Si,* señor," he answered lightly. "With the hands. But the hands I mus' keep without dirt, señor!"

His hand came away from his pocket and he made a sudden gesture, still laughing, toward Rand's face. The trapper jerked back quickly. Then a great booming swell of laughter went up, even the slow rumble of Kootanie George's voice and the tinkling tremulo of Ernestine Dumont's joining it. Ramon Garcia had brought out his gloves and had drawn them on before Rand had understood.

In size and physique Rand was the average there. The young Mexican was the shortest, slightest man in the house. But none knows better than the dwellers in the North Woods that it is unwise to judge men by mere size of body. It is well to look to the eyes of one's antagonist.

Garcia sprang forward and slapped Rand's face so that the face burned and the sound of the blow was like a pistol shot in the quiet room. And as Rand's return threshing blow sought him he sprang away, laughing.

"For calling me Greaser," he cried lightly. "When I have said out loud that I am Ramon Garcia."

Bellowing curses Rand charged at him again. Garcia avoided and seemed to have no difficulty whatever in so doing.

"Will you open the door, señor?" he called to a man standing near the entrance.

"He wants to have an open trail to run," jeered Rand. And again striking heavily his blow found the empty air and a second resounding slap reddened his other cheek.

"For calling me a breed," taunted Garcia, so that all might hear the words with the slap of the open hand. "Me who have the blood of kings, blue like the skies."

The man standing at the door . . . it chanced to be young Frank Marquette . . . obeyed Garcia's command silently and promptly. Rand, his rage flaring ever higher as men drawing chairs and tables out of the way laughed at him and as the Mexican's sallies taunted him, hurled himself forward purposing to get his enemy in a corner of the room. But at the best the trapper was awk-

ward and Ramon Garcia's little feet in his little boots carried him much as the fabled winged sandals bore the hero Perseus in his encounter with the dragon. Not once had Rand landed a square blow; not once had Garcia been where the big red fists looked for him. And while Rand breathed heavily, Ramon Garcia, whose soul was as deeply steeped in the dramatic as Père Marquette's in colour, sang maddening little snatches of love songs and stole swift glances now and then at Ernestine Dumont.

From the beginning it was clear that Garcia was playing with the other. But the end, coming swiftly, was not what men had looked for. A great gasp went up at it, followed by a shout of applause and a roar of laughter. Garcia had tantalised his antagonist, but beyond slapping his face twice had not touched him. He skipped about him like a French dancing master and so allowed Rand to make a fool of himself for the moment. Presently, so had the Mexican engineered it, they were not five steps from the open door and the way was clear. One instant he had seemed about to draw back again, to avoid Rand as he had avoided him so many times.

"You little monkey-man!" Rand was shouting at him. "Stand still and . . ."

That was all that he said. Garcia had leaped forward; his two gloved hands had sped like

lightning to Rand's wrists, he had seized the bigger man and had pushed him backward, had suddenly whirled him about, with a bunching of strength which men had not guessed was in him he had thrown Rand out through the open door, and as the trapper plunged forward into the muddy road the Mexican lifted his foot and kicked.

"For calling me dago!" smiled Garcia. "Me, whose blood is of Castile." He stripped off his gloves and tossed them into the road. "They are spoil! Bah. Pig!"

Rand was back at the threshold, his face blood red, his hands dripping the mud from the slushy road. But young Frank Marquette had stepped out to meet him and had closed the door.

For a little all eyes in the room rested intent upon Ramon Garcia. The first estimate, founded upon dandified clothes and manner, had changed swiftly. He was a man even though he wore gloves and was overfond of posing. Even though everything he did was overdone, whether it be the bowing over an old Frenchman's hand, the wide sweep of his hat in a flourish of slow gracefulness, the tender love making to a woman for whom he did not care the snap of his little white fingers, upon occasion his soft eyes knew how to grow keen and hard and he carried himself with the assurance of fearlessness. It was as though he had worn a lace cloak over a capable, muscled body;

as though the cloak had been blown aside by a sudden gust and men had seen the true man underneath.

In Kootanie George's eyes where there had come to be a widening of slow astonishment during the brief struggle now was a dawning admiration. He put out his great hand as he shambled forward.

"I called you Greaser, too," he said heavily. "I take it back, Garcia. You're a white man. Shake."

Garcia took his hand readily, laughing.

"And you, señor, whom I thought a clown are a gentleman," he answered, a trifle of impudence in the gaze which swept the big man from head to heel. Kootanie grinned a bit, passed over the innuendo in silence and went back to his chair. Garcia, giving an added twist of fierceness to his mustaches, returned to his dice game.

For a little Dave Drennen had been forgotten. Now he was remembered. His appearance here to-night provoked interest for two reasons. For one thing he had packed off on a lonely prospecting trip two weeks before, impatient at the delayed thaw, unwilling to wait until the trails were open enough for a man to travel off the beaten route. For another thing one never sought Dave Drennen where other men drew together as they had congregated now. If under that hard ex-

terior he felt any of the emotions which other men feel, if he had his joys and his griefs, he chose to experience them alone. Consequently the mere fact of his appearance here now brought a flicker of curious interest with it. Unless he had a quarrel with some man in the Frenchman's house, what had brought him?

"M'sieu," Pere Marquette was saying the worn phrase, "you do me an' Mamma Jeanne the honour! You are welcome, m'sieu!"

With the usual phrase came the customary offering. Drennen caught the glass from Marquette's hand and drank swiftly. The glass he set on the counter, putting down a coin with it.

"There's your money, old man," he said shortly. "Give me my change."

"But, m'sieu," smiled Père Marquette, pushing the money back toward his latest guest, "one does not pay to-night! It is fifty year . . ."

"I pay my way wherever I go," cut in Drennen curtly. "Will you give me my change?"

Marquette lifted his two hands helplessly. Never had a man paid for drink upon such an occasion, and this was the fiftieth! And yet never before had Drennen come, and there must be no trouble to-night. With a little sigh the old man took up the money, fumbled in his pockets and laid down the change. Drennen took it up without a word and without counting and strode

through the room to the table where Ramon Garcia sat, the one table where men were throwing dice. He drew up a chair and sat down, his hat brought forward over his eyes.

When the last man to throw had rattled and rolled the dice across the table top the cup sat at Drennen's right hand. He took it up, asking no question, saw what the bet was which they were making, put his own money in front of him and threw. He was in the game. And no man living in MacLeod's Settlement had ever known Dave Drennen to sit into any sort of game until now.

"Tiens!" whispered a dried up little fellow who had come down the river from Moosejaw during the afternoon. "There shall be fon, *mes enfants!* One day I see heem play *la roulette* in the place of Antoine Duart'. There shall be fon, *mes enfants! Sacré nom de dieu,"* and he rubbed his hands in the keenness of his anticipation, "he play like me when I am yo'ng."

CHAPTER IV

THE LUCK OF NO-LUCK DRENNEN

DRENNEN'S entrance into the game, informal as it had been, elicited no comment from the other players. He had made his little stack of silver in front of him, coins of the States. There was other American money staked, jingling fraternally against pieces struck in the Canadian mint. Even a few *pesos* had found their way from Garcia's pockets and were accepted without challenge.

For fifteen minutes the game was quiet and slow enough. Then at a smiling suggestion from the Mexican the original bet was doubled. It was poker dice now, having begun as razzle dazzle. There were no horses since horses delayed matters. Beside Drennen and Garcia there were five other men playing. The Mexican when he suggested doubled stakes was losing. Then his fortunes began to mend. The man across the table from him, cleaned out of his few dollars, got up and went to watch the game of solo. Quite steadily for a little Garcia won. He sang his

fragments of love songs and between throws made eyes at Ernestine Dumont. Drennen frowned at him, both for his singing and for his love making. Garcia continued to win and to sing.

Drennen lost as steadily as Garcia won. "No-luck" his nickname was—"No-luck" the goddess at his elbow to-night. Without speaking, when the dice cup came around to him, he doubled the already doubled stakes. One other man, shaking his head, silently drew out of the game. The others accepted the challenge as it had been given, in silence. Garcia, with every air of confidence, turned out the high throw and fingered his winnings smilingly. Drennen's hand sought his pocket.

"Double again?" he asked bluntly, his hard grey eyes upon the Mexican.

Ramon Garcia laughed.

"As you will, señor," he said lightly. And under his breath, musically, his eyes going to the nook by the fireplace, *"Dios!* It is sweet to be young and to love!"

Drennen's hand brought from his pocket a canvas bag heavy with gold. There was a goodly pile of money in front of the Mexican. The stakes were doubling fast, the two evidently meant business, and when the dice rolled again they were playing alone and a little knot of men was watching.

"You shall see," chuckled the dried-up little man from Moosejaw.

Ernestine Dumont was whispering in Kootanie George's ear. From the mesh bag at her wrist she took something, offering it to him eagerly. George stared at her and then shook his head.

"Keep it," he muttered. "I don't need it."

He didn't look at the hand which was being dealt him but left his table and went across the room to where Drennen and Ramon Garcia were sitting, carrying with him the money he had had before him. As he went he thrust his big hand down into his pocket and as he slumped heavily into a chair opposite Drennen he brought out another canvas bag. It too struck heavily against the table top. Drennen did not look at him. Garcia smiled and nodded brightly, and in turn, dropped to the table his purse, heavy like the others and giving forth the musical metallic chink.

"Ah! But this is pretty!" murmured Père Marquette, glad at once to see peace and a game which would interest his guests. "Jules, bring more wine, plenty. Make the fires up, big."

"How big are you bettin' 'em?" Kootanie George demanded as he emptied his canvas bag and piled several hundred dollars in neat yellow stacks.

Garcia lifted his shoulders, showed his fine white teeth pleasantly and looked to Drennen.

"As big as you like," retorted Drennen crisply. And then, lifting his voice a little, "Marquette!"

"Oui, m'sieu." Marquette came quickly to the table.

"I want some money . . . for this."

Then Drennen spilled the contents of his bag upon the table and for a moment every man who saw sat or stood riveted to his place, absolutely without motion. Then a gasp went up, a gasp of wonder, while here and there a quick spurt of blood in the face or a brilliant gleam of the eye told of quickened heart beats and the grip of that excitement which man never lived who could fight down altogether. Drennen had turned out upon the table top a veritable cascade of nuggets.

"Gold!"

The word sped about the room, whispered, booming loudly, creating a sudden tense eagerness. Men shoved at one another, craning necks, to peer at the thing which Drennen so coolly had disclosed. Gold! Nuggets that were, in the parlance of the camp, "rotten" with gold. Drennen two weeks ago had left the Settlement with his last cent gone in a meagre grub stake; now he was back and he had made a strike. A strike such as no man here had ever dropped his pick into in all of the ragged years of adventuresome search; a strike which could not be a week's walk from MacLeod's, a strike which might mean millions

to the first few who would stake out claims.

Père Marquette stared and muttered strange, awestruck French oaths and made no move to unclasp his hands, lifted before him in an attitude incongruously like that of prayer. Kootanie George, whom men called rich and who owned a claim for which two companies were contending, stared and a little pallor crept into his cheeks. Ramon Garcia broke off in the midst of his little song, softly whispering, *"Jesus Maria."* No-luck Drennen had found gold!

"Well?" demanded Drennen savagely, swinging about upon Marquette, who was bending tremulously over him. "Didn't you hear me?"

"Mais oui, m'sieu," Marquette said hastily, his tongue running back and forth between his lips. "But, m'sieu, I have not so much money in the house."

The men who had surged about the table dropped back silently and began speaking in half whispers, each man after a moment seeking for his "pardner." One of them upon such a quest carried the word across the street to the warehouse and the dance came to an end in noisy confusion. . . . To-night the Settlement was filled to overflowing; to-morrow it would be deserted.

"Give me what you've got," Drennen commanded, his hand lying very still by the heap of dull-gleaming rock. "Bring the scales here."

The scales were brought, and after a mixture of guessing and weighing, Drennen pushed two of the nuggets across the table to Marquette and accepted minted gold amounting to six hundred dollars.

"The rest, m'sieu?" offered Marquette. "Shall I put it in the safe for you?"

"No, thanks," said Drennen drily, as he put the remainder into his pocket. "I prefer to bank for myself." The brief words, the insult of the glance which went with them, whipped a flush into the old man's cheeks. He offered no remark, however, and went back with his scales to the counter where he was surrounded by men who wanted the "feel" of the nuggets in their palms.

No longer was Ernestine the only woman in the rooms. Flush-cheeked and sparkling eyed, old women and young, alike impressed with the story which in its many forms was already going its rounds, came trooping back from the dance. Many hands at once reached out for the two nuggets, tongues clacked incessantly, while old prospectors and young girls alike ventured their surmises concerning the location of the strike. It was to be noted that no one had asked the only man who knew.

No-luck Drennen's luck had come to him. That was the word which again ran through the babel of conjectures. And when a man has had the

luck which had been Drennen's for the years which the North had known him, and that luck changed, the change would be sweeping. Men might follow in his wake to a path of gold.

Meanwhile Dave Drennen played his game of dice in sombre silence. Over and over, losing almost steadily, he named a larger wager and Garcia and Kootanie George met his offer. He bet fifty dollars and lost, a hundred and lost, two hundred on a single cast and lost. In three throws over half of his money was gone. Three hundred and fifty dollars; he had two hundred and fifty left to him. Twice had the Mexican won; once George, taking in the two-hundred dollar bet. George's face was flushed; he had won four hundred dollars at one throw since the Mexican's two hundred had come to him with Drennen's. George had never played dice like this and the madness of it got into his slow blood and stood glaring out of his eyes.

"Two hundred fifty," offered Drennen briefly. He shoved the last of his pile out on the table. George covered it quickly, his big, square fingers shaking.

Garcia smiled at them both, then transferred his smile to his own money. In two throws he had won three hundred dollars, in one he had lost two hundred. He seemed to hesitate a moment; then he saw Ernestine Dumont standing upon a

deserted card table, her cheeks rosy with excitement, and the sight of her decided him. He sighed, raked his money from the table to his pocket and got to his feet, moving gracefully through the crowd with many, *"Dispensame, señor,"* and went to Ernestine's side. Kootanie George did not mark his going. For it was Kootanie George's throw and two hundred and fifty dollars were to be won . . . or lost.

George turned out the cubes and a ripping oath followed them. He had thrown a pair of deuces. His big fist came down upon the table with a crash. Drennen stared at him a brief moment while the cup was raised in his hand, contempt unveiled in his eyes. Then he rolled out the dice. Something akin to a sob burst from Kootanie George's lips. Drennen had turned out a "stiff," no pair at all.

"It's mine!" cried George, his great body half thrown across the table as he tossed out both arms to sweep in his winnings. "Mine, by God!"

Ernestine was clapping her hands, her eyes dancing with joy even while they were shot through with malice. Drennen's glance went to her, came back to Kootanie George to rest upon him sneeringly. Then he laughed, that ugly laugh which few men had heard and those few had remembered.

"Gold!" jeered Drennen. "It's a little pinch

of gold, and you go crazy over it! You are a fool."

"It's mine!" cried George again. He had won only a little over six hundred dollars and he could have afforded to have lost as much. But he was in the grip of the passion of the game.

"You've got about a thousand dollars there," said Drennen eyeing the jumble of coins in front of the big Canadian. He jerked the old canvas bag out of his pocket and let it fall heavily to the table. "One throw for the whole thing, mine against yours."

Kootanie George knew gold when he saw it and now he knew that there was nearer two thousand than one in that bag. He gripped the dice box, glared at Drennen angrily, hesitated, then with a sudden gesture turned out the dice.

He had cursed before when he had made his throw; now he just slumped forward a little in his chair, his jaw dropping, the color dribbling out of his cheeks, finding all words inadequate. He had thrown two deuces again. Again Drennen looked at him contemptuously. Again George heard his ugly laugh. Drennen threw his dice carelessly. And upon the table, between the canvas bag and the glitter of minted gold, there stared up into George's face five fives.

"Damn you," cried the Canadian hoarsely, his fingers hooked and standing apart like claws as

he half rose from his chair. "Damn you!"

His nerves were strung high and tense and the words came from him involuntarily. They were the clean words of rage at which no man in the world could take offence unless he sought a quarrel. And yet Drennen, as he moved forward a little to draw his winnings toward him, thrust his face close up to Kootanie George's and said crisply:

"Say that again and I'll slap your face!"

"Damn you!" shouted George.

And with the words came the blow, Drennen's open palm hard against George's cheek.

"And now George will kill him!" cried Ernestine through her set teeth.

CHAPTER V

THE WAY OF THE NORTH

"OH, mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" half sobbed old Marquette. "They will kill one the other! Another time it matters not. But to-night, here! . . . Stop; I forbid it!"

One blow had been struck and already the compact circle about the two men had squared as those who watched drew back along the walls leaving the centre of the room clear. They had jerked tables and chairs away with them. One table, the one at which Drennen and George had sat a moment ago, with its load of virgin gold and minted coins, was now against the further counter, young Frank Marquette guarding it, that the gold upon it might go to Drennen when the fight was over. . . .

"If he is alive then," he muttered, his eyes narrowing as they took note of the black rage distorting the big Canadian's face. "If George does not kill him it is a miracle of Satan."

"You are come to-night for trouble." Slowly Kootanie George slipped his heavy coat from his

shoulders. His deep, hairy chest, swelling to the breath which fairly whistled through his distended nostrils, popped a button back through a frayed button hole and stood out like an inflated bellows. "I just say, 'Damn you.' That is nothin' for a man to fight. You look for trouble, an' by God, I am ready!"

He flung the coat from him and lifted his big hands. Drennen was standing waiting for him, his own hands at his sides, his steely eyes filled with an evil light. He made no answer beyond the silent one of a slight lifting of his lip, like a soundless wolfish snarl.

"I forbid!" screamed Père Marquette again. "Another time it is nothing. To-night it is to insult Mamma Jeanne. Stop it, *chiens!*"

But Mamma Jeanne had her own word to say. Her plump arms were about her indignant spouse, dragging him back.

"Let them be," she commanded. "Is not George a guest and has he not the right to put his heel upon an evil serpent? It is just," she cried, her eyes all fire. "It will be but a little minute and, *pouf!* it is all over. Let them be!"

She had great faith in the prowess of her man, had Mère Marquette. Had there been a thunder storm outside, had Père Marquette wished it to stop while Mère Marquette wanted it to continue,

she would have put her arms about him and pleaded, "Let it be."

"There shall be fon, *mes enfants,*" whispered the old prophet from Moosejaw.

Slowly, but light footed enough, lifting his great hands still a little higher, Kootanie George came forward. Drennen waited, his lip raised in the bitter snarl which seemed frozen upon his dark face, his grey eyes malevolent. He had fought with many men, he was not afraid to fight; all men there knew that. But they wondered, looking at him and then at the other, if he understood the thing standing unhidden in Kootanie George's eyes.

Yes, he understood. For, just the wee fraction of a second before the Canadian struck, Drennen jerked up his own hands, ready for him. And the two struck at the same instant. There was to be no finesse of boxing; these men had no knowledge of fistic trickery. All that they knew was to fight, to strike hard and straight from the shoulder, opposing strength with strength, swiftness with swiftness, merciless hatred with a hatred as merciless. And so it happened that both blows landed, two little coughing grunts following close upon the impact telling how mightily, and both men reeled back. There was blood upon Drennen's lower lip. The upper was still lifted snarlingly from the red-stained teeth.

Ramon Garcia, watching with an interested smile, nodded his head as though in approval and glanced at Ernestine Dumont upon the table above him. Much of the colour had gone out of her cheeks, leaving them drawn and pallid. Her parted lips too showed the whiteness of her hard set teeth.

"I," meditated Ramon Garcia as his eyes returned to the two men, "I should be less frightened of George than of her. Her eyes are like a devil."

A bare fisted, relentless, give and take fight such as this promised to be is common enough wherever hard men foregather, dirt-common in a country where the fag end of a long winter of enforced idleness leaves restless nerves raw. The uncommon thing about the brief battle or in any way connected with it lay in the attitude of the onlookers. Rarely is a crowd so unanimous both in expectation and desire. George would kill Drennen or would nearly kill him, and it would be a good thing. A man of no friends, Drennen had no sympathiser. No man who watched with narrowed eyes, no woman on table or chair or hiding her face in her hands, but asked and looked for the same ending.

Though from the first it was apparent that George was the bigger man, the heavier, the stronger, it was silently conceded that these qual-

ities though they mean much do not count for everything. It became clear almost as they met for the first blows that the slenderer was quicker and that if Kootanie George was confident Drennen was no less so. And, when they both reeled backward, a many-voiced murmur of surprise was like a reluctant admission: Drennen had done two things which no other man had ever done before him; he had kept his feet against the smashing drive of that big fist in his face and he had made George stagger. For the moment it looked as though the two would fall.

Once more George came forward slowly while Drennen waited for him, again they met, Drennen leaping forward just as the Canadian's sledge of a clenched hand was lifted. Each man threw up a guarding left arm only to have his brawny guard beaten through as again the two resounding blows landed almost like one; this time there was a trickle of red from the Canadian's mouth, a panting, wheezing cough from the American as he received the other's blow full in the chest. For a dizzy moment they stood separated by the very fury of their onslaught, each balancing.

"They are men!" murmured Garcia in delight. And Ernestine, leaning far out from her table, cried breathlessly:

"George! If you love me . . ."

George glanced at her, a slow smile upon his

battered lips. He ran the back of his hand across his mouth and again moved forward, slowly. And again Drennen snarling, awaited him.

This time George crouched a little as he made his attack, and as he drew closer he moved more swiftly, bunching his big muscles, fairly hurling his great body as he leaped and struck, reckless of what blows might find him, determined by his superior weight alone to carry the other back and down. And as though Drennen had read the purpose in the smouldering eyes he too leaped forward so that the two big bodies met in mid air. Like one blow came the sounds of the two blows given and taken as the impact of the two bodies gave out its soft thud. And as one man the two went down together, fighting, beating brutally at each other, all rules of the game forgotten save that one alone which says, "He wins who wins!"

For a little they clenched and rolled upon the floor like two great, grim cats. Through the sound of scuffling came the noise of short-armed jabs, the deep throated curses of Kootanie George and once . . . his first vocal utterance . . . one of Dave Drennen's laughs. It was when he had again driven his fist against George's mouth, drawing blood from both lips and hand cut by breaking teeth.

Kootanie George's left arm was flung about the neck of the man at whose body his white knuckled

fist was driving like a piston; the American had craned his neck and in order to protect his face held it pressed close to George's breast. Drennen's right arm was about George's body, caught against the floor as they fell, Drennen's left hand with thumb sunken deep was already at the Canadian's throat. The snarl upon Drennen's face was the more marked now, more filled with menace and hate as his body experienced the torture of the other's regular blows.

For a little they were strangely silent, Kootanie having given over his ripping oaths, strangely quiet as they lay with no movement apparent beyond the ceaseless rhythmic striking of George's arm. Even those blows ceased in a moment as George's hand went hurriedly to the wrist at his breast. The thumb at his throat had sunk until the place where it crooked at the joint was lost; George's face from red had gone to white, then to a hectic purple. Now they strove for the mastery of the hand at the throat, George dragging at it mightily, Drennen's fingers crooked like talons with the tendons standing out so that they seemed white cords in the lamplight. George's breath came in short, shorter gasps, he tugged with swelling muscles, his own hand a terrible wrenching vice at Drennen's wrist. And when the purple face grew more hideously purple, when the short gasps were little dry sounds, speaking pite-

ously of agony and suffocation, when still the relentless grip at his throat was unshaken, men began for the first time to guage the strength which lay in the great, gaunt frame of Dave Drennen.

And George too had begun to understand. Suddenly his hand came away from the iron wrist and sought Drennen's throat for which his wide bulging eyes quested frantically. His hand found what it sought at last, but Drennen had twisted his head still a little further to the side, brought his face still lower and closer against the Canadian's chest, and George could not get the grip where he wanted it, full upon the front of the throat. He tore at the rigid muscles below the jaw a moment and the bloody, broken skin of Drennen's neck told with what fury George had striven.

But George must hasten now and he knew it. Again his right hand sought Drennen's left, fought at the deadly grip at his own throat. In his reach a quick cunning came to him and his groping fingers passed along Drennen's wrist and did not tarry there. Up and up they went, the great questing fingers of the Canadian, until at last they found the fingers of the other man. Here they settled. And then those who watched saw the middle finger of Drennen's hand drawn back from the flesh of George's neck, saw it bent back and back, still further back until it was a pure wonder

that Drennen held on, back and back. . . . And then there was a little snap of a bone broken and Drennen's hand fell away and Kootanie George, drawing a long, sobbing breath, rolled clear of him and slowly rose to his feet.

Drennen too rose but not so slowly. His left hand was at his side, the one broken finger standing oddly apart from its fellows, as he ran the three steps to meet Kootanie George. George threw up his arm, but the savagery of the blow beating upon him struck the guard aside and Kootanie George, caught fairly upon the chin flung out his arms and went down. He brushed against the wall behind him in falling and so came only to his knees on the floor, his hands out before him. Drennen stood over him, breathing deeply, gathering his strength for a last effort. George staggered perceptibly as he got to his feet, a queer look in his eyes. Drennen struck swiftly, his fist grinding into the pit of Kootanie's stomach and, as the big man crumpled, finding his chin again. And as George staggered a second time Drennen was upon him, Drennen's laugh like the snarl of a wolf, Drennen's hand, the right this time, at George's throat. . . .

A thin scream from Ernestine Dumont quivering with a strange blend of emotions, a spit of flame, a puff of smoke hanging idly in the still air of the room, the sharp bark of a small calibre re-

volver, and Drennen's hand dropped from Kootanie's throat. He swayed unsteadily a moment, stepped toward her, his eyes flecked with red and brimming with rage, his hand going to the wound in his side.

"Cat," said Drennen deliberately.

As he fell back, a sudden weakness upon him, settling unsteadily into a chair, Ramon Garcia struck up the barrel of the smoking gun in Ernestine's hand and the second bullet ripped into the papered ceiling. Then Kootanie George turned slowly, his eyes full upon Ernestine's, and said as Drennen had said it,

"Cat!"

"You are one big brute!" cried Mère Jeanne angrily. "You, to call her that when she shoot because she love you! I should do like that for Marquette here."

"She has put me to shame, made me a man for men to laugh at," said George heavily. "What, am I no man but a little baby that a woman must fight my fight? I am done with her."

Drennen's face had gone white; the fingers gripping his torn side were sticky and wet and red. He rose half way from his chair only to drop back, the rigid muscles along his jaw showing how the teeth were hard set. He had seemed to forget Ernestine, George, all of them, his gaze seeking and finding the table where his gold lay, then

lifting to Frank Marquette's face suspiciously. Then it was that he noted and that others marked for the first time how again the outer door had opened that night to admit tardy guests. A little flicker of surprise came into his eyes, and small wonder.

Three persons had entered before Ernestine had cried out and fired the first shot, two men and a girl. The men would come in for their share of attention later; the girl demanded hers now, like a right and a tribute. She stood a little in front of her companions. Her eyes widened, growing a little hard as they watched the end of the fight, passed from Drennen and Kootanie George to Ernestine Dumont, came slowly back to George, rested finally upon Drennen as though their chief interest lay with him. She did not show fear as a woman of her appearance might be looked upon to show it; there were interest and curiosity in her look and, finally, when after a long time she looked again from Drennen to Ernestine, a high contempt.

In spite of the heavy white sweater whose collar was drawn high about her throat, in spite of the white hood concealing all but one stray wisp of brown hair, her loveliness was unhidden, looking out in all of the splendid glory of youthful health and vigour. Her eyes were as grey as Drennen's own, but with little golden flecks seeming to float

upon sea-grey, unsounded depths. She might have been seventeen, she could not have been more than twenty, and yet her air was one of confidence and in it was an indefinable something which was neither arrogance nor yet hauteur, and which in its subtle way hinted that the blood pulsing through her perfect body was the blood of those who had known how to command since babyhood and who had never learned to obey. When later men learned that that blood was drawn in riotous, converging currents from unconquerable fighting Scotch highlanders and from a long line of French nobility there came no surprise in the discovery. Men and women together, Kootanie George and Ernestine, Garcia and Drennen, Père Marquette and Mère Marquette, felt the difference between her and themselves.

"We seem to interrupt," she said coolly, her voice deeply musical, as she turned to Père Marquette. He, looking a little dazed and stupid from all that had taken place, but never forgetful of his duties as host, had come toward her hesitantly, his lips seeking to form a new phrase of greeting. "We are tired and need food. Everything seemed closed but your place. So we came in."

"You are welcome, mam'selle," he said hurriedly. "Mos' welcome. It is unfortunate . . ."

"Captain Sefton," went on the girl quite calmly,

"will you see what you can do for that man? He is losing a great deal of blood."

Captain Sefton, a thin, hawk-eyed man with a coppery Vandyke beard, shrugged his shoulders distastefully but passed her, drawing near Dave Drennen. The girl turned toward the second of her companions, a younger man by half a dozen years, who brought the stamp of the cities in his fashionable clothes, the relentless marks of a city's dissipation about his small mouth and light eyes and, in air and features, a suggestion of the French.

"Marc," she said, drawing at her gauntlets, her back upon Sefton and Drennen, "if you can arrange for a room for me I shall go to it immediately."

Marc obeyed her as Captain Sefton had done, turning to Marquette with an inquiry. Drennen's eyes were only for a fleeting moment upon Sefton whose quick fingers were busy at the wound. Then they returned to the table at which he had diced. Frank Marquette, seeing the look, poured the gold all into the canvas bag and brought it to him.

The eyes of one man alone did not waver once while the girl was in the room, black eyes as tender as a woman's, eloquent now with admiration, their glance like a caress. Ramon Garcia spoke softly, under his breath. Ernestine Dumont

looked down at him curiously. She had not understood the words for they were Spanish. They had meant,

"Now am I resigned to my exile!"

CHAPTER VI

THE PROMISE OF A RAINBOW

FOR a week Dave Drennen lay upon the bunk in the one room dugout which had been home for him during the winter. Stubborn and sullen and silent at first, snarling his anger as sufficient strength came back into him, he refused the aid which the Settlement, now keenly solicitous, offered. He knew why the men who had not spoken to him two weeks ago sought to befriend him now. He knew that the swift change of attitude was due to nothing in the world but to a fear that he might die without disclosing his golden secret.

"And I am of half a mind to die," he told the last man to trouble him; "just to shame Kootanie George, to hang Ernestine Dumont and to drive a hundred gold seekers mad."

During the week a boy from Joe's Lunch Counter brought him his meals and gave him the scant attention he demanded. The boy went away with money in his pockets and with tales to tell of a man like a wounded bull moose. Always

there were eager hands to detain him, eager tongues to ask if Drennen had let anything drop. Always the same answer, a shake of the head; he had learned nothing.

The day after the affair at Père Marquette's had seen MacLeod's Settlement empty of men. Each one following his own hope and fancy they had gone into the mountains, heading toward the north as Drennen had headed two weeks before, some following the main trail for a matter of many miles, others breaking off to right or to left at tempting cross-trails, hastening feverishly, dreaming dreams and finding rude awakenings. The snows were melting everywhere upon the slopes, the dirty waters running down the trails making an ooze at midday which sucked up and destroyed the tracks of the men who travelled over it in the crisp early mornings.

There was no sign to tell whether Drennen had gone straight on during the seven days he might have been pushing away from the camp and had made his strike at the end of them, or whether he had turned off somewhere hardly out of sight of the handful of shacks marking MacLeod's Settlement. No sign to tell that the golden vein or pocket lay within shouting distance from the Settlement or fifty, seventy-five miles removed. And Drennen, lying on his back upon his hard bunk, stared up at the blackened

beams across his ceiling and smiled his hard, bitter smile as he pictured the frantic, fruitless quest.

Sefton, the man with the coppery Vandyke beard, thin-jawed and with restless eyes, had given him certain rude help at Marquette's and had been among the first the following day to offer aid. Drennen dismissed him briefly, offering to pay for what he had already done but saying he had no futher need of clumsy fingers fooling with his hurt. Sefton favoured him with a keen scrutiny from the door, hesitated, shrugged his thin shoulders and went away. Drennen wondered if the girl, who seemed in the habit of ordering people around, had sent him.

At the end of the week Drennen was about again. He had kept his wound clean with the antiseptic solutions to be obtained from the store and under its bandages it was healing. He found that he was weaker than he had supposed but with a grunt drove his lax muscles to stiffen and obey his will. From the door he came back, found a broken bit of mirror and looked curiously at the face reflected in it. No beautiful sight, he told himself grimly. It was haggard, drawn and wan. A beard three weeks old, the black of it shot through here and there with white hairs, made the stern face uncouth.

"I look a savage," he told himself disgustedly, tossing the glass to the cluttered table. Then,

with a grim tightening of the lips, "And why not?"

He made his way slowly, his side paining him no little, to Joe's Lunch Counter. It was late afternoon and the street was deserted. A gleam of satisfaction showed fleetingly in his eyes; he knew why the street was deserted and the knowledge pleased him.

None of the Settlement was in Joe's restaurant, but the presence of the two strangers who had come with the girl saved it from utter desertion. They were finishing a light meal as Drennen entered and looked up at him curiously. Drennen saw a quick glance interchanged. He knew the meaning of this, too, knew that the story of his strike had gone its way to them, that because of those nuggets which even now weighted his pocket he was a marked man, a man to be reckoned with, to be watched, to be followed, to be fawned upon if possible. He frowned at Sefton's nod and took his place at the lunch counter.

Presently the younger of the two, Captain Sefton's companion, got up and came to Drennen's side, offering his hand.

"I am glad to see you around again," he said pleasantly.

Drennen did not look toward him.

"Some more coffee, Joe," he said shortly.

The young fellow stared at him a moment, a

quick retort upon his lips. It was checked however by Sefton saying quickly:

"Come on, Lemarc. It's none of your funeral if a man wants to be left alone. Let's go find Ygerne."

Ygerne. So that was her name, Drennen thought as he stirred two heaping spoons of sugar into his coffee and out of the corner of his eye watched the two men go out. Well, what was the difference? One name would do as well as another and she was an adventuress like the rest of them in this land of hard trails. Else why should she be here at all, and with men like Lemarc and Sefton? Had he not distrusted all men by sweeping rule these two at least he would have distrusted for the craft in their eyes.

He drank his second cup of coffee, stuffed his old pipe full of coarse tobacco and went outside. Sefton and Lemarc had passed out of sight. Drennen hesitated just a second, pausing at the door. He was pitifully weak. He supposed that the thing for him to do was to crawl back to his bunk for the remainder of the day and the long night to follow. He clamped his pipe stem hard between his teeth. He'd do nothing of the kind. Did strength, any more than anything else in the world, come to a man who lay on his back and waited for it? He needed exercise.

So he strolled down through the quiet Settle-

ment, turned into the trail which leads upward along old Ironhead's flank, driving his body mercilessly to the labour of the climb. There was a spot he knew where he could sit and look down across the valley and from which far out somewhere to north or south he might see fools seeking for the gold he had found. It was a little cup set in the side of the mountain, a tiny valley at once beautiful and aloof, and he had not been here since last fall. In it he could rest unmolested, unwatched.

During the day there had been showers; now the sun was out warmly while here and there the sky was hidden by clouds and in places he could see the little mists shaken downward through the bright air. Warm rains would mean a quickened thaw, open trails and swifter travel. In a way a propitious season was making it up to him for the time he was losing in idleness with a hole in his side.

An odd incident occurred that afternoon. Drennen, hard man as he was, inured to the heavy shocks of a life full of them, felt this little thing strangely. He was resting, sitting upon a great boulder under a pine tree. The cup-like valley, or depressed plateau, lay at his left, himself upon an extreme rim of it. As he brooded he noted idly how the sunshine was busied with the vapour filled air, building of it a triumphant arch, gloriously

coloured. His mood was not for brightness and yet, albeit with but half consciousness, he watched. Did a man who has followed the beck of hope of gold ever see a rainbow without wondering what treasure lay at the far end of the radiant promise? So, idly, Dave Drennen now.

At first just broken bits of colour. Then slowly the bits merged into one and the arc completed, the far end seeming to rest upon the further rim of the level open space. It seemed a tangible thing, not a visioned nothing born of nothingness and to perish utterly in a twinkling.

"A promise that is a lie," he said to himself bitterly. "Like the promises of men."

And then . . . to his startled fancies she had come into being like the rainbow, from nothingness . . . where the foot of the arch had appeared to rest stood the girl, Ygerne. A quarter of a mile between Drennen sitting here and her standing there, a stretch of boulder strewn mountain side separating them, God's covenant joining them. Drennen stiffened, started to his feet as though he had looked upon magic. At the foot of the rainbow not just gold . . . gold he had in plenty now . . . but a woman . . .

He laughed his old ugly laugh and settled back upon his rock, his eyes jerked away from her, sent back down the slope of the mountain to the

green fringe of the Little MacLeod. He knew that his senses had tricked him as one's senses are so prone to do; that she had merely stepped into sight from behind a shoulder of blackened cliff; that the most brilliantly coloured rainbow is just so much sunlight and water. And he knew, too, that she would have to pass close to him on her way back to the Settlement unless she went to considerable effort to avoid him.

He saw her shadow upon a patch of snow in the trail where the rock protected it. He did not turn his head. He heard her step, knew when it had stopped and her shadow had grown motionless. She was not ten paces from him.

Stubbornly he ignored the silent challenge of her pausing. With slope shoulders he sat motionless upon his rock, his face turned toward the Little MacLeod, his freshly relighted pipe going calmly. Yet he was aware, both from the faint sound of her tread upon the soft ground and from her shadow, cast athwart the path, that she had come on another couple of steps, that she had stopped again, that her gaze was now no doubt concerned with his profile. He did not seek to make it the less harsh, to soften the expression of bitterness and uncouth hardness which his bit of a mirror had shown him in the dugout. He found that without turning to see he could remember just what her eyes looked like. And he had seen them

only once and that when his chief concern was a bullet hole in his side.

While Drennen drew five or six slow puffs at his pipe neither he nor the girl moved. Then again she drew a pace nearer, again stopped. He sent his eyes stubbornly up and down the willow fringed banks of the Little MacLeod. His thought, used to obeying that thing apart, his will, concerned itself with the question of just where the gold seekers were driving their fools' search for his gold.

Stubbornness in the man had met a stubbornness no less in the girl. Though his attitude might not be misread she refused to heed it. He had half expected her to go on, and was idly looking for a shrug of the shadow's shoulders and then a straightening of them as she went past; he half expected her to address him with some commonplace remark. He had not thought to have her stand there and laugh at him.

CHAPTER VII

"A PRINCESS SENT TO PACK WITH WOLVES!"

BUT laugh she did, softly, unaffectedly and with plainly unsimulated amusement. She laughed as she might have done had he been a little child indulging in a fit of pouting, she the child's mother. Her laughter irritated him but did not affect a muscle of his rigid aloofness. Then she moved again, drawing no nearer but making a little half circle so that she stood just in front of him breaking his view of the river. The hard grey of his eyes met the soft greyness of hers.

"Why are the interesting men always rude?" she asked him out of a short silence.

He stared at her coolly a moment, of half a mind to reply to the foolishness of her question with the answer which it deserved, mere silence.

"I don't know," he retorted bluntly.

"Yes, they are," she told him with deep gravity of tone, just as though he had done the logical thing, been communicative and said, "Are they?" The gravity in her voice, however, was notably in contrast with the crinkling merriment about the

corners of her eyes. "Perhaps," she went on, "that is one of the very reasons why they *are* interesting."

He made no answer. His regard, sweeping her critically, went its way back down the mountain side. Not, however, until the glorious lines of her young figure had registered themselves in his mind.

"Perhaps," she ran on, her head a little to one side as she studied him frankly, "you didn't realise just how interesting a type you are? In feminine eyes, of course."

"I know about things feminine just as much as I care to know," he said with all of the rudeness with which she had credited him. "Namely, nothing whatever."

Without looking to see how she had taken his words he felt that he knew. She was still laughing at him, silently now, but none the less genuinely.

"You are not afraid of me, are you?" she queried quite innocently.

"I think not," he told her shortly. "Since your sex does not come into the sphere of my existence, Miss Ygerne, there is no reason why I should be afraid of it."

"Oh!" was her rejoinder. "So you know my name, Mr. Drennen?"

"I learned it quite accidentally, young lady.

Please don't think that the knowledge came from a premeditated prying into your affairs."

She ignored the sneer as utterly negligible and said,

"And you used to be a gentleman, once upon a time, like the prince in the fairy tale before the witches got him. *Cherchez la femme.* Was it a woman who literally drove you wild, Mr. Drennen?"

"No," he told her in his harshly emphatic way.

"You are very sure?"

He didn't answer.

"You are thinking that I am rather forward than maidenly?"

"I am thinking that a good warm rain will help to clear the trails."

"You wish that I would go away?"

"Since you ask it . . . yes."

"That is one reason why I am staying here," she laughed at him. "By the way, Mr. Newly-made Crœsus, does this mountain belong to you, too? Together with the rest of the universe?"

He knocked out the ashes of his pipe, refilled the bowl, stuffing the black Settlement tobacco down with a calloused, soil-grimed forefinger. And that was her answer. She saw a little glint of anger in his eyes even while she could not fully understand its cause. A maid of moods, her mood

to-day had been merely to pique him, to tease a little and the hint of anger told her that she had succeeded. But she was not entirely satisfied. With truly feminine wisdom she guessed that something of which she was not aware lay under the emotion which had for a second lifted its head to the surface. She could not know that she awoke memories of another world which he had turned his back upon and did not care to be reminded of; she did not know that the very way she had caught her hair up, the way her clothes fitted her, brought back like an unpleasant fragrance in his nostrils memories of that other world when he had been a "gentleman."

"Your wound is healing nicely?" she offered. And, knowing instinctively that again his answer would be silence, she went on, "It was very picturesque, your little fight the other night. The woman who did the shooting, I wondered whether she really loved Kootanie George most . . . or you?"

"Look here, Miss Ygerne . . ."

"Ygerne Bellaire," she said with an affected demureness which dimpled at him. "So you may say: 'Miss Bellaire.'"

"I say what I damned please!" he snapped hotly, and through the crisp words she heard the click of his teeth against his pipe stem. "If the flattery is not too much for a modest maiden to

stand you may let me assure you that the one thing about you which I like is your name, Ygerne. Speaking of fairy tales, it sounds like the name of the Princess before the witches changed her into an adventuress, and sent her to pack with wolves. When it becomes necessary for me to call you anything whatever I'll call you Ygerne."

It was enough to drive her in head-erect, defiant, orderly retreat down the mountainside. But she seemed not to have heard anything after the first curt sentence.

"So you do 'what you damned please'? That sounds interesting. But is it the truth?"

Her perseverance began, in spite of him, to puzzle him. What in all the world of worlds did she want of him? Also, and again in spite of him, he began to wonder what sort of female being this was.

"And so my name is really the only thing commendable about me?" she went on. "My nose isn't really pug, Mr. Drennen."

She crinkled it up for his inspection, turning sideways so that he might study her profile, then challenging his eyes gaily with her own.

"It is said to be my worst feature," she continued gravely. "And after all, don't you think one's nose is like one's gown in that it's true effect lies in the way one wears it?"

"How old are you?" he said curiously, the

ice of him giving the first evidence of thaw.

"Less than three score and ten in actual years," she told him. "Vastly more than that in wisdom. Who's getting impertinent now?"

He hadn't said half a dozen sentences to a woman in half a dozen years. But then he hadn't seen a woman of her class and type in nearly twice that length of time. Besides, a week of enforced idleness in his dugout, of blank inactivity, had brought a new sort of loneliness. A bit surprised at what he was doing, a bit amused, not without a feeling of contempt for himself, he let the bars down. He leaned back a little upon his rock, caught up a knee in his clasped hands, thus easing the ache in his side, and set his eyes to meet hers searchingly.

"This is an odd place for a girl like you, Ygerne," he said meditatively.

"Is it? And why?"

"Because," he answered slowly, "so far as I know, only two kinds of people ever come this way. Some are human hogs come to get their feet into a trough of gold; some are here because there is such a thing as the law outside and it has driven them here."

"But surely some come just through a sense of curiosity?"

"Curiosity is too colourless a motive to beckon or drive folks out here."

"Why are you asking me a question like this? You have succeeded in making it rather plain that you feel no interest whatever in me."

"I am allowing myself, for the novelty of the thing, to talk nonsense," he told her drily. "You seemed insistent upon it."

"So that's it? Well, I at least can answer a question. Two motives are to thank or to blame for my being here. One," she said coolly, her eyes steady upon his, "has beckoned, as you put it; the other has driven. One is the desire to get my feet into the golden trough, the other to get my body out of the way of the law. Your hypothesis seems, in my case as in the others, to be correct, Mr. Drennen."

In spite of him he stared at her a little wonderingly. For himself he gauged her years at nineteen. He was rather inclined to the suspicion that she was lying to him in both particulars. But something of the coolness of her regard, its vague insolence, something in the way she carried her head and shoulders, her whole sureness of poise, the intangible thing called personality in her tempered like fine steel, made his suspicion waver. She was young and good to look upon; there was the gloriously fresh bloom of youth upon her; and yet, were it not for the mere matter of sex, he might have looked upon her as a gay and utterly unscrupulous young adven-

turer of the old type, the kind to bow gallantly to a lady while wiping the stain of wet blood from a knife blade.

"You are after gold . . . and the law wants you back there in the States?" he demanded with quiet curiosity.

"I am after gold and the law has sought me back there in the States," she repeated after him coolly.

"The law has long arms, Ygerne."

"It has no arms at all, Mr. Drennen. It has a long tail with a poisonous sting in it."

"What does it want you for?" He was making light of her now, his question accompanied by a hard, cynical look which told her that she could say as much or as little as she chose and he'd suit himself in the extent of his credulity. "Were you the lovely cashier in an ice cream store? And did you abscond with a dollar and ninety cents?"

"Don't you know of Paul Bellaire?" she flung at him angrily.

"I have never met the gentleman," he laughed at her, pleased with the flush which was in her cheeks.

"He died long before you were born," she said sharply. "If you talked with men you would know. He was my grandfather. We of the blood of Paul Bellaire are not shop girls, Mr. Drennen."

"Oho," sneered Drennen. "We are in the presence of gentry, then?"

"You are in the presence of your superior by birth if not in all other matters," she told him hotly.

"We, out here, don't believe much in the efficacy of blue blood," he said contemptuously.

"The toad has little conception of wings!" she gave him back, in the coin of his own contempt. "Queer, isn't it?"

He laughed at her, more amused than he had been heretofore and more interested.

"You haven't told me definitely about your terrible crime."

"You have been equally noncommittal."

Drennen shrugged. "I am not greatly given to overtalkativeness," he said shortly. "I have no desire to usurp woman's prerogative."

"But are quite willing to let me babble on?"

"I'm going to put in time for a couple of hours. You are less maddening than the walls of my dugout."

She looked at him keenly, silent and thoughtful for a little. Then she said abruptly:

"Have you told any one yet of your discovery?"

So that was it. His eyes grew hard again with the sneer in them.

"No," he informed her with a bluntness full of finality.

"You spoke of the hogs with their feet in the trough. You are going to let no one in with you?"

"I am not in the habit of giving away what I want for myself."

"But you can't keep it secret always. You'll have to file your claim, and you can't file on all of Canada. . . . I want to ask you something about it."

"No doubt," with his old bitter smile. "For a fortune you'd repay me with a smile, would you? You'd find easier game in the gilded youth on Broadway."

Her lips grew a little cruel as she answered him.

"You may tell me as much or as little as you like. You may lie to me and tell me that your gold is twenty miles westward of here while it may be twice or half that distance eastward. Or you may leave that part out altogether. But it would be another matter to answer the one question I will ask." Her eyes were upon him, very alert, watchful for a sign as she asked her question: "Were the nuggets free and piled up somewhere where some man before you had placed them?"

If she sought to read his mind against his will she had come to the wrong man. It was as though Drennen had not heard her.

"Are you married to either of the hang dogs with whom you are travelling?" he asked.

"No," she answered indifferently.

"They're both in love with you, no doubt?"

"I fancy that neither is," she retorted equably. "Both want to marry me, that's all."

Drennen gazed thoughtfully down into the valley, pursing his lips about his pipe stem.

"I'll make a bargain with you," he said finally from the silence in which the girl had stood watching him. "You have dinner with me; we'll have the best the Settlement knows how to serve us, and I'll let you try to pump me."

She looked at him curiously.

"You have the name of a trouble seeker, Mr. Drennen. Do you fancy that you can anger Marc and Captain Sefton this way?"

"That, too, we can talk about at dinner, if you like."

For a moment she looked at him, gravely thoughtful, her brows puckered into a thoughtful frown. Then she put back her head with a gesture indefinably suggestive of recklessness, and laughed as she had laughed when she had first come upon him.

"The novel invitation is accepted," she said lightly. "I must hurry down to dress for the grand occasion, Mr. Drennen."

Before she could flash about and turn from him

David Drennen did a thing he had done for no woman in many years. He rose to his feet, making her a sweeping bow as he lifted his hat with the old grace which the years had not taken from him. And as she went down the mountain side he dropped back to his rock, his teeth again hard clamped upon his pipe stem, his eyes steely and bitter and filled with cynical irony.

CHAPTER VIII

DUST OF IDOLS

DAVID DRENNEN'S statement concerning the two powerful motives responsible for the presence in the North Woods of the greater portion of her hardy denizens had been essentially truthful. The shadow of prison bars or perhaps the gaunt silhouette of the gallows, vivid in an overstimulated fancy, has sent many a man roving; the whisper down the world of yellow gold to be taken from the earth, transforming the blackened claw gripping it into the potent fingers of a money king, has entered the ear of many a wanderer and drawn him to such a land as this. An evil nature, a flare of temper, a wrong done and redressed in hot wrath and red blood, a mistake or a weakness or a wild spirit born a hundred years too late, any of these things might send a man into the North Woods. But Drennen, who made the statement to Ygerne Bellaire, was in himself an exception to it.

For half a score of years this land of hard trails, this far out place where man met man with-

out veneer, where nature's breasts lay stripped of covering and naked, where life was the old life of things elemental, where primal laws were good laws, where there was room enough for the strong and scant room for the weak, David Drennen had found a spacious walled home. Half of the year his house had the lofty, snow-capped mountains for its only walls, the sweeping blue arch for its roof, sun, moon and stars for its lamps. There were months when he knew of no other footfall than his own throughout the vastness of his house. There had been times when, seeing the thin wisp of smoke against the dawn telling of a camp fire five miles away, he had grumbled and trampled out his own embers and moved on, seeking solitude.

He had brought into the mountains a heart at once sore and bitter. The soreness had been drawn out of it in time; the bitterness had but grown the more intense. Hard, mordacious, no man's friend . . . that was the David Drennen who at Père Marquette's fête sought any quarrel to which he might lay his hands. The world had battled and buffeted him; it had showered blows and been chary of caresses; he had struck back, hard-fisted, hard-hearted, a man whom a brutal life had made brutal in its own image.

There had been a scar made in his world of men and women to mark his leaving it, such a scar

as a thorn leaves in the flesh when rudely drawn out. A tiny cicatrix soon almost entirely lost as the niche which had been his was filled and the healing over was perfected. It doesn't take long for the grass to grow over the graves of the dead; the dew forming upon the mounded turf is less like tears than like glistening jewels to deck the earth in the joyous time of her bridehood in the spring; the flight of birds over it and their little bursts of melody are eloquent of an ecstasy which does not remember. How little time then must pass to wipe out the memory of the passing of a David Drennen from the busy thoroughfares into the secluded trails?

He had been a young man, the lightest hearted of his care-free set, when the crash came. The chief component characteristics of the young David Drennen of twenty were, perhaps, a careless generosity, a natural spontaneous gaiety which accepted each day as it came, a strong though unanalysed faith in his fellow being. Life made music in tuneful chords upon the strings of his heart. The twin wells of love and faith were always brimming for his friends; overflowing for the one man whose act was to turn their waters brackish and bitter. That man was his father, John Harper Drennen, a man prominent enough in the financial world to make much copy for the newspapers up and down the country and

to occupy no little place in transoceanic cable messages when the story broke.

A boy must have his hero worship. Rarely enough does he find his Alexander the Great, his Washington or his Daniel Boone, his Spartacus or his Horatius in his own household. But the motherless David had proved the exception and had long ago begun to shape his own life in the picture of his father's, investing him with attributes essentially divine. John Harper Drennen was a great man; the boy made of him an infallible hero who should have been a demigod in face of the crisis. And when that crisis came his demigod fled before it, routed by the vengeance seeking him.

Young Drennen had struck a man in the face for breaking the news to him and had felt a virtuous glow as he called the man "Liar!" He experienced a double joy upon him, the lesser one of his militant manhood, the greater of realising that it had been granted him, even in a small way, to fight a bit of his father's battle. He had gone out upon the street and a newsboy's paper, thrust to him, offered him the glaring lie in great black letters for a penny. He had torn the thing across, flinging it away angrily. There would be a libel suit to-morrow and such an apology as this editorial cur had never dreamed he had it in him to write. He heard men talk of it in the subway and

laugh, and saw them turn wondering eyes to meet his glare. He made short his trip home, anxious to enlist under his father's standard, thrilled with the thought of gripping his father's hand.

When he found that his father, who should have returned two days ago from a trip to Chicago had not come back, he despatched a telegram to the lake city. The telegram was returned to him in due course of time; his father was not in Chicago and had not been there recently. He wired Boston, Washington, Philadelphia. His father was at none of his hotels in any of these cities. The boy prepared himself in calm, cold anger to wait for his father's return. But John Harper Drennen had never returned.

During the week which dragged horribly, he refused to read the papers. They were filled with such lies as he had no stomach for. Only the knowledge that the older Drennen was eminently capable to cope with his own destiny and must have his own private reasons for allowing this hideous scandal to continue unrefuted, held him back from bursting into more than one editorial room to wreak physical, violent vengeance there. His respect for his father was so little short of reverent awe, that he could take no step yet without John Harper's command. Quizzed by the police, questioned by the Chief, knowing himself dogged wherever he went, feeling certain that

even his mail was no longer safe from prying eyes, he said always the same thing:

"Some of you are fools, some liars! When Dad comes back . . !"

He had choked up under the keen eyes of the Chief. And what angered him most was the look in the Chief's eyes. It was not incredulity; it was merely pity.

At first the papers had it that John Harper Drennen had absconded with fifty thousand dollars of the Eastern Mines Company's money. With rapid investigation came ready amplification of the first meagre details. Drennen's affairs were looked into and it was found that through unwise speculations the man had been skirting on thin ice the pool of financial ruin for a year. The deficit of fifty thousand grew under the microscope of investigation to sixty thousand, eventually to seventy-five thousand.

When at last David Drennen got the back numbers of the papers and locked himself up in his father's library to work his way laboriously through the columns of fact and surmise he was not the same David Drennen who had struck a man in the face for suggesting to him that his father was a thief. Here was the first sign of a weakening of faith; here the first fear which strove wildly to prove itself a shadow. But from shadow emerged certainty. He looked his spectre

in the face and it did not dissolve into thin air. When he had done he put his face upon his arms and sobbed. The tardy but crushing sense of his hero's guilt had stricken him; the thought that his father had in no way confided in him, had left him without a word, perhaps without a thought, broke his heart. He was never to be quite the same David Drennen again.

He remained at his father's home through the weary months during which the miserably sordid horror dragged on. One morning he packed into a suitcase the few little articles which he felt were his own. He went out of the house before the others came in; he had no desire to see the home go, as everything else had gone, to pour its handful of golden sand into the great hole which John Harper's ruin had left behind him. It had been almost a year since the first news; and upon the day on which David Drennen set his back to all he knew and his face toward what might come to him, a paper brought the last word. He read it calmly upon the train, wondering at himself that there was such a thing as calm left to him. A man, looking over his shoulder, commented on the news lightly. Drennen didn't answer. He was visualising the final episode dully; the great, masterful body of his own father in the Paris morgue, the ignominious grave, even the cowardly death, self-dealt.

"And he never wrote me," he muttered to himself.

There he was wrong, though he could not know it until months later when the brief letter, forwarded to him by the Chief, reached him. His face had been hard, because his heart was hard, when he read the note which at last John Harper Drennen had written and which, sodden and blurred, was found upon the dead body drawn from the Seine.

"Dear Davy," it had said. "Some day maybe you'll come to forgive me. God dealt me a hard hand to play, boy. Be a man, Davy; for your mother's sake if not for your dad's."

Drennen a year ago would have dropped his face into his hands and would have wept over this letter; now he laughed at it. And the laugh, this first one, was the laugh men came to know as Dave Drennen's laugh. It was like a sneer and a curse and a slap in the face.

The hardest blow the fates could deal him had been delivered mercilessly. But other relentless blows were to come after, and under their implacable, relentless smiting the soul of the man was hardened and altered and made over as is the bit of iron under the blacksmith's hammer. Those characteristics which had been the essentials of the

spiritual man of last year were worked over; the fine steel springs of buoyancy were beaten into thin knives of malignancy. That the work might be done thoroughly there was left in him one spark which glowed later on and grew into friendship for a man whom he met far in the north where the Yukon country called to such men as Drennen. The friendship fanned into life a lingering spark of the old generous spirit. Drennen, gambling his life lightly, had won as careless gamblers are prone to do. He made a strike; he trusted his new friend; and his friend tricked, betrayed and robbed him. This blow and others came with the gaunt years. At the end of them David Drennen was the man who sought to quarrel with Kootanie George; he was a man like a lone wolf, hunting alone, eating alone, making his lair alone, his heart filled with hatred and bitterness and distrust. He came to expect the savagery of the world which smote and smote and smote again at him, and he struck back and snarled back, each day finding him a bitterer man than the preceding day had left him. Long before he had turned back from the Yukon to the North Woods, empty handed, empty hearted, men had come to call him "No-luck" Drennen. And as though his ill fortune were some ugly, contagious disease, they shunned him even as invariably as he avoided them.

Men knew him in Wild Cat, two weeks hard going over an invisible trail from MacLeod's; they knew him at Moosejaw, two hundred and fifty miles westward of the Settlement; wherever there was news of gold found he was known, generally coming silently with the first handful of venturesome, restive spirits. But while his coming and his going were marked and while eyes followed him interestedly men had given over offering their hands in companionship. Now and then he moved among them as a man must, but always was he aloof, standing stubbornly apart, offering no man his aid in time of difficulty, flaring into blazing wrath the few times on record when men showed sympathy and desire to befriend him.

Superstition, abashed-eyed step daughter in the house of civilisation, lifts her head defiantly in the wilderness. She is born of the solitudes, a true daughter of the silent places. Here, where men were few and scattered broadcast by the great hand of adventure across the broken miles of all but impassable mountains, superstition is no longer merely an incident but an essential factor in human life and destiny. And here men long ago had come to frown when their questing eyes found the great, gaunt form of David Drennen in the van of some mad rush to new fields: He was unlucky; men who rubbed shoulders with him

were foredoomed to share his misfortune; the gold, glittering into their eyes from a gash in the earth, would vanish when his shadow fell across it.

In many things he had grown to be more like a wild beast than a man. He had hunted with the human pack and he had found selfishness and jealousy and treachery on every hand. He came to look upon these as the essential characteristics of the human race. Even now that he was wounded he saw but one sordid motive of greed under the hesitant offers of help; even now he had been less like a wounded man than a stricken wolf. The wolf would have withdrawn to his hidden lair; he would have contented himself with scant food; he would have licked his wound clean and have waited for it to heal; he would have snapped and snarled at any intrusion, knowing the way of his fellows when they fall upon a wounded brother. So Drennen.

CHAPTER IX

"TO THE GIRL I AM GOING TO KISS TO-NIGHT!"

AN odd mood was upon him this afternoon. Perhaps since moods are contagious, his was caught from the girl, Ygerne. With a sort of jeering laughter in his heart he surrendered to his inclination. The world had gone stale in his mouth; a black depression beat at him with its stiffling wings; an hour with the girl might offer other amusement than the mere angering of Lemarc and Sefton. He wanted only one thing in the world; to be whole of body so that he might fare out on the trail again, a fresh trail now that gold lay at the end of it. But since he might not have the greater wish he contented himself with the lesser.

He shaved himself, grimly conscious of the contempt looking out at him from the haggard eyes in the mirror. Those eyes mocked him like another man's. Then he went to Père Marquette's store, paying scant attention to the three or four men he found there. He made known his wants and tossed his gold pieces to the counter, taking

no stock of curious gazes. He saw that Kootanie George was there and that Kootanie's big boots were gummed with the red mud of the upper trail. He took no trouble to hide his sneer; Kootanie George, too, had been out in search of his gold and had returned empty handed.

To each question of Père Marquette his answer was the same:

"The best you've got; damn the price."

Marquette had but the one white silk shirt in the house and Drennen took it, paying the ten dollars without a word. There were many pairs of boots to fit him; one pair alone took his fancy, though he knew the rich black leather and the shapely high heels would cause him to hurl them away to-morrow as things unfit for the foot of man. He selected corduroy breeches and a soft black hat and returned to his dugout, leaving fifty dollars upon the counter. And when he had dressed and had laughed at himself he went back up the muddy road for Ygerne. But first he stopped at Joe's.

"I want the private room," he said, and Joe nodded eagerly as he saw Drennen's hand emerge from his pocket. "And I want the best dinner for two you can put on. Trimmings and all."

Joe, slipping the first of Drennen's money into his pocket and cherishing high hopes of more, set himself and his boy to work, seeing his way

of arriving at the second gold piece with no great loss of time.

The long northern twilight was an hour old when Drennen called for Ygerne. She came out of her room at Marquette's ready for him. She had told him she must "dress" for the occasion. He had thought her joking. In spite of him he stared at her wonderingly a moment. And, despite her own gathering of will, a flush crept into her cheeks under his look while her own eyes widened to the alterations a little effort had made in the man. And the thing each noted swiftly of the other was scarcely less swiftly noted by all men and women in the Settlement before they had gone down to Joe's: he had suddenly become as handsome as a devil from hell; she as radiant as an angel.

"Are we just going to step into a ballroom for the masquerade?" she half whispered with a queer little intake of breath as she found his arm with a white gloved hand. "And is all this," waving at the Settlement itself, the river snaking its way through the narrow valley, the frowning fronts of Ironhead and Indian Peak against the saffron sky, "just so much painted canvas for the proper background?"

He laughed and brought his eyes away from the white throat and shoulders, letting them sweep upward to the mystery of her eyes, the dusky hair

half seen, half guessed under the sheen of her scarf, wondering the while at the strange femininity of her in bringing such dainty articles of dress to such a land. Then, his eyes finding the prettily slippered and stockinged feet, he moved with her to the side of the road where the ground was harder.

Joe had seen with amazing rapidity that the "trimmings" were not wanting. With old knowledge born of many years of restaurant work, he knew that any day some prospector might find that which all prospectors endlessly sought and that then he would grind his bare grubstake contemptuously under his heel and demand to eat. Upon such occasions there would be no questions asked as to price if Joe but tickled the tingling palate. Joe had unlocked the padlock of the cellar trapdoor; he had gone down and had unlocked another padlock upon a great box. And all that which he had brought out, beginning with a white tablecloth and ending with nuts and raisins, had been a revelation to his boy assistant. There was potted chicken, there were tinned tomatoes and peaches, there were many things which David Drennen had not looked upon for the matter of years.

The "private room" into which Joe, even his apron changed for the occasion, showed them was simply the far end of the long lunch room, half

shut off from the rest of the house by a flimsy partition having no door, but a wide, high arch let into it through which a man at the lunch counter might see the little table and both of the diners.

Drennen, stepping in front of Joe, took Ygerne's scarf, drew out her chair for her, and having seen her seated, took his own place with the table between them. He nodded approvingly as he noted that Joe had not been without taste; for the restaurant keeper had even thought of flowers and the best that the Settlement could provide, a flaming red snowplant, stood in the centre of the table in a glass bowl of clean white snow.

Joe brought the wine, a bucket at which the boy had scrubbed for ten minutes, holding the bottle as the glass bowl held the snow-plant, in a bed of snow. When he offered it a trifle uncertainly to Drennen's gaze and Drennen looked at it and away, nodding carelessly, Joe allowed himself to smile contentedly. Champagne here was like so much molten gold; it was assured that Drennen was "going the limit."

Drennen lifted his glass. His glance, busied a moment reminiscently with the bubbling amber fluid, travelled across the table. Ygerne Bellaire had raised her glass with him. Her eyes were sparkling, a little eager, a little excited, perhaps a little triumphant.

"Isn't it fun?" she said gaily.

He looked back gravely into her laughing eyes.

"May I drink your health?" he demanded. "And success to whatever venture has brought you so far from the beaten trail."

She set down her glass, making a little moue of pretended disappointment at him with her red mouth.

"And I was thinking that I was to have the honour of drawing something gallant, at least flattering, something befitting the occasion, from you!" she said: "Why don't you say, 'Here's lookin' at you,' and be done with it?"

He laughed.

"Then I'll say what I was thinking. May I drink this to the one woman I have ever seen whom I'd fall in love with . . . if I were a fool like other men?"

He drank his wine slowly, draining the glass, his eyes full upon hers. She laughed and when he had done said lightly,

"At least that's better." She sipped her own wine and set it aside again. "Why didn't you say that in the first place? Why must you think one thing and say another?"

"That way lies wisdom," he told her coolly.

"Or stupidity, which?" she retorted.

"Shall a man say all of the foolish things which flash into his brain?"

"Why not?" She shrugged, twisting her glass

in slow fingers. "If all of the nonsense were taken out of life what would be left, I wonder?"

"I have the honour to entertain the high-born Lady Ygerne Bellaire at dinner," he said in mock deference. "Her request is my command. Shall I voice my second idiotic thought?"

She nodded, making her mouth smile at him while her eyes were gravely speculative.

"Then," and his bow was in accord with the mockery of his tone, "I was thinking that for the reason best known to the King of Fools I'd like to kiss that red mouth of yours, Ygerne!"

"You'd be the first man who had ever done so," she told him steadily.

"Quite sure of that?" he sneered.

"Yes."

"Tempting me further?" he laughed at her.

"I don't think you'd dare, with all of your presumption, Mr. Drennen."

"Because there are a couple of men out there to see, I suppose?"

"No. I don't think that that would stop you. Because of this."

A hand, dropped to her lap, came up to the level of the table top and in its palm he saw the shining barrel of a small automatic pistol. Again he laughed at her.

"It seems the latest fad for women to carry such playthings," he ridiculed her. "I wonder how

frightened you'd have to be before you could pull the trigger?"

"Just merely angered," she smiled back at him, as the weapon went back into her lap, and out of sight.

"It's just a trifling episode, this shooting a man," he suggested. "I suppose you've done that sort of thing before?"

"If I hadn't perhaps I shouldn't be here now," she informed him as quietly as he had spoken.

It flashed upon Drennen, looking straight into her unfaltering eyes, that the girl was telling him the truth. Well, why not? There was Southern blood in her; her name suggested it and her appearance proclaimed it. And Southern blood is hot blood. His instinct was telling him that she was some new type of adventuress; her words seemed to assure him of the fact.

"Since I cannot be about my business these days," he said slowly, "I am fortunate in finding so entertaining a lady to share my idleness."

"And I in finding so gallant a host," she smiled back at him.

Joe served the first of his lighter courses and withdrew. As time passed a few men came into the lunch room, their eyes finding the two figures in the private room. Drennen observed them casually. He saw Marc Lemarc and Captain Sefton. The old hard smile clung for a moment to his lips as he marked the angry stare which the

man with the coppery Vandyck beard bestowed upon him. He saw Kootanie George enter alone; he saw, a little later, Ernestine Dumont flirting with Ramon Garcia, ignoring the big Canadian. Garcia stepped to Joe's side to arrange for the use of the room in which Drennen and Ygerne were; Ernestine, thinking the room empty as it usually was, came on to the arch of the door before she saw its occupants. As her eyes swept quickly from Ygerne to Drennen a hot flush ran up into the woman's cheeks. Then, with a little, hard laugh, she turned back to find a seat with Garcia at one of the oilcloth covered tables. Garcia, for the first time seeing Ygerne, bowed sweepingly, his eyes frankly admiring her, before he sat down with Ernestine.

"Ygerne!" said Drennen out of a desultory conversation in which an idle question put and unanswered was promptly forgotten.

"Well?" she asked quietly.

"I am going to tell you something. You will note that I have had but the one glass of wine; I have drunk only one toast. Therefore we may admit that I am sober and know what I am about. We are going to talk of the thing I have found somewhere in the mountains. That is why we are met to-night . . . so that you may have your opportunity to try to learn what I alone know, what you and so many others want to know.

When we have finished our little banquet you, being a free agent, are at liberty to call upon one of your friends there or even upon Joe, to see you to your room. Or you can accept my escort."

While she watched him, her elbows on the table, her chin upon her clasped hands, he poured himself a second glass. She saw the light in his eyes change subtly as he continued:

"A second toast, my Princess Ygerne! To the girl I am going to kiss to-night on our way between Joe's and Marquette's! He held his glass up and laughed at her across the top of it. "To the girl I'd love now were I a fool; the girl I wouldn't know to-morrow if I saw her! The girl who pits the beauty of her body against the calm of a man's brain. The girl whose eyes are as beautiful as shining stars. The girl whose eyes are filled with the madness of the lust of gold! To a sweet-faced, cool-hearted little adventuress . . . My Lady Ygerne! Am I insulting? You knew that before you did me the honour to dine with me. Shall I drink the toast, Ygerne?"

She sat regarding him gravely, the dimples of a moment ago merely sweet memories, her eyes stars no longer but deep twin pools, mystery-filled.

"Was there a time when you were a gentleman, Mr. Drennen?" she asked steadily.

"Was there a time when you were as innocent as you look, Ygerne?" he answered coolly.

He saw the anger leap up in her eyes, he noted a sudden hard, tense curving of her lips. Then, lifting her white shoulders, she laughed softly as she leaned back in her chair, relaxing.

"Drink," she said lightly. "As you say, we shall talk of your new strike. As you say, that is why I am here with you. And then . . ."

He had tossed off his wine and now said sharply:

"Then you will allow me the pleasure of escorting you to the door of Père Marquette's . . . or you will get one of your hangdogs or Joe here to see you home. Which?"

"Do you think I am a coward?" she said quickly.

"All women are, I think," was his blunt answer.

"Then try to kiss me when you please! Since I am your guest to-night I shall expect you to see me to my room."

"I have told you what will happen."

She smiled at him. He saw the fleeting dimples at the corners of the red lipped mouth. And he saw too, in her eyes, the glint as of steel.

"Speaking of your discovery, Mr. Drennen . . ."

He laughed.

CHAPTER X

SEEKERS AFTER GOLD

THERE had been only three loitering men and one woman enjoying Joe's hospitality as they went out. The men were Lemarc, Sefton and Ramon Garcia, the woman Ernestine Dumont. Drennen saw that Ygerne made cool pretence of seeing none of them; Lemarc and Sefton had no doubt lingered to watch her leave and she did not take kindly to such espionage. She was busy with the careful buttoning of a glove, the left glove. The right hand she left bare.

Not fifty steps from Marquette's Drennen laid his hand upon her arm.

"Kiss me, Ygerne," he commanded quietly.

There was little light, but he saw the glint of it upon the pistol in her hand.

"You know what you would have to pay," she said coolly. "Is it worth it?"

For answer he threw out his arms to draw her lithe body close up to his. But as her gloved hand struck him across the face she had sprung back, twisting a little, avoiding him, putting a

quick two yards between them. He felt, rather than saw, that her pistol, levelled across the short space separating them, bore full upon his chest.

"Wait! Listen to me. You must listen."

She was no longer calm. He could hear her panting, whether from the exertion of snatching herself away from him or from the tense grip of whatever emotion was playing upon her nerves he could not tell.

"Don't you know that I mean what I say? That I can kill you, that I will kill you if you dare insult me further?"

"I know only one thing," he told her, his voice sterner than she had heard it before. "The King of Fools has put a mad desire into my brain. And you have helped him. I am always ready to pay for whatever I get and I am not used to haggling over the price."

"I have told you that I would kill you if you dared!" she flashed the words at him.

"And I," he retorted coolly, "told you that I'd kiss you if you dared come with me. Were we both bluffing? Or neither, Ygerne?"

"Coward!" she panted, and he knew how the red lips curled to the words. Even that picture but made madder the mad longing upon him. With his ugly laugh at the odd twist of feminine logic which had applied such an epithet at such a time, he came swiftly toward her.

As he came on Ygerne fired. The darkness was thick, but it seemed to her frowning eyes that he had foreseen the shot at the second before it was fired and had swung his shoulders to the side so that it cut by him without touching him. Again she fired; but now he was upon her and his hand had struck the pistol aside so that the questing bullet sped skywards. His arms were about her, drawing her tighter until they hurt her; she heard his breathing as his lips sought hers. Her right arm was held down at her side but her left hand struck at his face, tore at him, thrust him each possible quarter of an inch away, shielded her face. Again and again she struck, an unthinkable strength in her tense body.

The door at Marquette's was thrown open and half a dozen men rushed out into the road. The girl felt Drennen's arm relax, the right arm about her shoulders. With a quick movement she slipped free of it.

"Who shot?" called one of the men. "What's wrong?"

Ygerne, two paces from Drennen's side, answered very quietly, her coolness amazing him.

"I fired. It was a wager with Mr. Drennen. I shot at a wolf. I think I missed. Didn't I, Mr. Drennen?"

Drennen did not answer. The men in the road muttered among themselves, guessed something of

the truth, laughed and went back into the house. Drennen walked with Ygerne to her own door. As he lifted his hat she threw open the door and the light streamed across his face. She saw that it was white and that his lips were set tight. Her eyes went quickly to the white silk shirt he had that day bought of Marquette. There was a widening splotch of red at the side, below the shoulder.

"Are you badly hurt?" she asked coolly.

"I don't know. I guess not. Good night, Ygerne."

"I thought that somewhere in you there was the soul of a gentleman," she said, her voice rising in clear scorn. "You are nothing but brute!"

"Nothing but brute," he repeated after her harshly. "You are quite right."

She looked at him fixedly a moment. Meeting her eyes he saw a swift change come. She was smiling at him now quite as though nothing unpleasant had arisen during a commonplace evening; she even put out her hand, the ungloved one which had shot him two minutes ago, and said lightly:

"I haven't thanked you for a very pleasant evening, Mr. Drennen. It is one I shall not forget soon. Good night."

For a moment he made no answer. Instead he stood looking steadily, curiously at her. Then

suddenly he stooped a little, caught up her hand and brushed it lightly with his lips; the right, ungloved hand. Then he turned away.

She saw that he steadied himself by the fence about Marquette's yard and now was moving slowly toward his dugout. He had forgotten to put on his hat and still held it crumpled in his hand. She stood for a little while staring after him. Then she went into the house, closing the door softly.

Drennen, making his slow way homeward, met the men Lemarc and Sefton in a place where the light from an open door streamed across the road. Before Lemarc cried out Drennen had seen the working muscles of his face; the man was in the grip of a terrible rage.

"Damn you," cried Lemarc wildly. "What have you done? That was Ygerne's gun; I know it. If you have laid a hand on her . . ."

"Stand aside, you fool," snapped Drennen, less angry at Lemarc than at himself for his own physical weakness.

"I tell you," shouted Lemarc, his hand whipping out from under his coat and upward, the lamp rays from the house running down the keen two-edged steel, "if you . . ."

"Shut up, Marc." It was Captain Sefton's voice, sharp and threatening and steady with its cold anger. Drennen, looking to him, saw in his

face a fury no less than Lemarc's but held under control. "Things are bad enough as they are."

"What do I care?" snarled Lemarc, wrenching at the hand Sefton had shot out to his arm. "If you think I'll stand for everything . . ."

"You'll stand for anything I say stand for," Sefton said coolly. "Remember that, Lemarc. Besides, Ygerne's all right. She can take care of herself, my boy. Come on."

Grumbling, Lemarc allowed himself to be led away. Drennen passed on and to his dugout. He found his bunk in the darkness and sat down upon the edge of it, resting, breathing heavily, his weakness grown already into giddy nausea. Finally, feeling the blood hot against his flesh and knowing that he must get it stopped, he struck a match and lighted a candle. With fingers shaking a little he tore his shirt away at the side and found the hurt. A little, contemptuous grunt escaped him as he made out just how bad it was. The bullet had merely ripped along his side, inflicting a shallow surface wound, coming the nearest thing in the world to missing him altogether. Had he not been pitifully nerveless from another wound not ten days old and his strength exhausted from his first active day since it had been given to him, he could have laughed at this and at the girl who had fired it. He stopped the bleeding as best he might,

drew a rude bandage about his body, and sank back on his bunk dizzy and sick.

"And now," he muttered disgustedly, "because I have been a damned fool over a pretty cat with a red mouth and poisonous claws I've got another week of hell before I can go out on the trail again."

The knowledge that he was a fool was no new knowledge to Drennen. He sneered at himself for staking his life against a chance woman's lips, and, snarling, put out his candle. He drew the tumbled covers of his bed about him, of neither strength nor will to undress or to go and close the door he had left open. He wanted to sleep; to wipe out the memory of this day's folly as he sought to lose the memory of all other days. He wanted his strength back because of the mere animal instinct of life, not because life was a pretty thing.

But he did not sleep. His was that state of weakness and exhaustion of a battered body which fends off immediate, utter restfulness. He had shut the gates of his mind to the girl, Ygerne. But it was as though his hands, holding the gates shut, were powerless, and her hands, dragging at them that she might enter, were strong. With weariness and faintness came a light fever.

Through his fever the girl passed and repassed all night. He saw her as she had stood yonder on

the mountain side, at the foot of the rainbow. He saw her as she had stepped out to meet him when he had gone to Marquette's for her, as she had sat across the table from him. Her white arms flashed at him, her white throat and bare shoulders shone through a blur of wandering fancies. Her red mouth was before him through the long hours, luring him now, the lips blossoming into a kiss; mocking him now; laughing with him, her cheeks dimpling as she laughed; laughing at him, hard as carved coral. All night the grey mystery of her eyes was upon him, their expression ever shifting, now filled with promise like dawn skies, now vague with threats like grey depths of ocean over hidden rocks.

When his will broke down in his utter weakness and he gave over trying to sleep, he drew himself up against the wall which was head-board for his bunk, lighted his candle and filled his pipe. Smoking slowly, the candle light in his eyes, the objects of his dugout brought into sudden harsh reality, he drove his mind away from the girl and sent it to the gold which he had discovered in its hidden place in the mountains. Now he could tell himself calmly that a few days of inactivity didn't matter. A few more days and he would be himself again; and then he might follow what path of life he chose, because he would be a rich man. And then he grew drowsy and dozed, only to have

Ygerne Bellaire slip back into his befogged imaginings with her white shoulders, her grey eyes and her red mouth.

When in the faint light before the dawn the sick yellow flame of the second candle was dying out Drennen was making his way to Joe's. He drank his coffee and then drove himself to eat two bowls of mush. His face was so bloodless and drawn that Joe stared at him as at a ghost. Each time that Drennen moved he felt a burning pain in his side as though the wound were tearing open afresh.

The forenoon he spent in his dugout, dozing a little, but for the most part staring moodily out of his open door at the muddy waters of the Little MacLeod. He was aware, toward noon, of an unusual bustle and stir in the Settlement. Men were arriving, almost in a steady stream, a few on horseback, the major part on foot. There floated out to him loud voices from Père Marquette's store; they were drinking there. He wondered idly what lay back of this human influx. He was too sick to care greatly.

He had left word with Joe to send the boy with lunch at noon. The boy came in shortly after one o'clock, explaining that there had been such a rush at the counter that Joe couldn't let him go sooner. Drennen cursed him and drove him out, asking no questions.

The human tide sweeping into the Settlement rose steadily during the afternoon. A street which had been deserted twenty-four hours ago was now jammed from side to side. Drennen came to understand dully as the day wore on that there could be but one explanation; a rush like this meant that some fool had dropped his pick into a vein of gold and word of it had flashed across the mountains. Even then, his pain and exhaustion and giddy sickness were such that he did not realise that he himself was to thank for the pouring of hundreds of men into MacLeod's.

When at last the true explanation did dawn upon him he reached out for his pipe, stuffed the bowl full of his tobacco and leaned back upon his bunk, his eyes frowning, his lips hard about his pipe stem. So, silent and brooding, he waited, knowing that it was to expect too much of human endurance to think that they would let him alone much longer.

The first man to visit him thrust through the doorway unceremoniously and coming straight to Drennen's side said bluntly, "I am Madden, Charles Madden of the Canadian Mining Company. Maybe you've heard of me?"

Drennen eyed him insolently, taking stock of the fresh cheeks, the keen blue eyes, the square, massive, masterly jaw, the assertive air, the clothing which was civilisation's conventional garb and

which in the matter alone of heavy laced boots made concession to the mountains. The man was young, perhaps had not yet gotten into his thirties, and none the less had already that dominance of personality belonging to a seasoned captain of industry. Drennen, drawing at his pipe, maintained his silence.

"Well?" demanded Charlie Madden.

He whipped at one gloved hand with the gauntlet he held in the other and stared at Drennen impatiently. He had just arrived and had made no delay in coming to the dugout; Drennen noted the dust of his ride upon his face, the spurs still upon his boots. The atmosphere he bore with him was one of business urgency.

"Damn it, man," snapped Madden, "I've got something else to do besides smother in your hovel. I'm here to talk business."

He flung himself into the solitary chair in the one-room place, jerked his head about, saw that the door was open, got up and closed it, and came back to his chair. Drennen, eyeing him with steady hostility, did not open his lips.

"Now," and Madden had tossed gauntlets and hat to the floor beside him, "I'm anxious to get this thing over with. You've struck gold, they tell me? Let's see the colour of it."

"What's your proposition?" Drennen asked carelessly.

Madden laughed his stock-in-trade laugh; it was intended to make the other man feel vaguely that he was talking nonsense to a seer.

"Do you think I run around with a proposition to make every prospector who thinks he's found a bonanza? Before I know where the claim is or see the dirt out of it?"

Drennen lay back a little, his hands clasped behind his head.

"I know something of your company and your methods," he said coolly. "You're a pack of damned thieves. And, since you ask it, I do think that you run around all loaded with your proposition. Your game is to pay a man enough to get him drunk and keep him drunk for a spell; that's his cash bonus; he gets the rest in stocks. Then you break him with assessments and kick him out. I'm not talking business to-day, thank you," he ended drily.

Madden looked at him keenly, making a swift appraisal which had in it something of the nature of a readjustment. Then he laughed again.

"Look here, Mr. Drennen," he said confidentially, leaning close to the man on the bunk, "my company has a bigger financial backing than any other in the country. We are willing to take what we can get as cheap as we can get it, of course I'll admit that. At the same time if you've got a gold mine we're ready and we're able to pay all it's

worth. You've got the brains to know that the day has passed for a man to work his own claim if there's anything in it. You've got to sell out to somebody. Why not to the Canadian?"

Now, Madden, having heard the tale of Drennen's dice game with a canvas bag of virgin gold backing his play and of a fight in which Drennen had gone down from a bullet fired by Ernestine Dumont, had made up his mind that in the dugout he would come upon a certain type of man which he knew well. He expected to find Drennen half sodden with liquor, garrulous, boastful and withal easy to handle. His estimate changed swiftly, but he altered merely in slight detail his plan of attack. After a keen glance about the dugout his words came smoothly. Drennen was no illiterate miner but he was sorely ridden by poverty, just the same.

"Give me your word that you've really found the real stuff," Madden said, "and we'll talk business. Oh, that isn't the ordinary course, to be sure, but I'm willing to make an exception after seeing you; you are not the ordinary man. Come out with me to Lebarge; we'll pick up a lawyer and sign some papers. For your protection and mine, understand. Then we'll have a look at your claim. Incidentally," his hand coming suddenly from his pocket with a roll of bills in it, "you can put in your own expense account, and," with a

wink, "you can go as far as you like. I'm a generous cuss with the company's money when they give me full swing."

Drennen put out his hand; Madden urbanely stripped off one of the bills and handed it to him. It was for fifty dollars. Drennen struck a match, set fire to a corner of the bill and used the lighter to get his pipe going. Madden, upon his feet in pink-faced wrath, was silenced by Drennen's voice booming out angrily:

"So you think you can bait me into your lawyer trap with jingling pennies in a tin cup! Look at that, man; look at that!"

With a sudden gesture he had caught out his canvas bag and had poured the heavy contents upon the bunk beside him. Madden bent forward quickly, and a little gasp came into his throat, a new, more vivid tide of pink into his cheeks as he saw. Drennen shoved fifty dollars in minted gold to one side.

"There's your change," he said crisply. And when Madden's fingers had reluctantly dropped the nuggets back to the quilt, "And as for propositions, I'm the man who's making them. I'm to be left alone to file on my claims and protect myself first. Then, if you're on hand, you can look my property over. I'm going to sell; if you're the first company to take up my offer it might be that I'd sell to you."

"And your proposition?" demanded Madden sharply.

"An assurance that the mine will be worked; ten per cent of the total number of shares in my name; a further assurance of exemption from assessment for ten years; and a little bonus."

Madden used his stock-in-trade laugh again. It was well that he made use of it when he did; else he would not have been able to summon it up from his paralysed throat. For he put a question and got a brief, direct answer, and the answer affected him much as a fist in the pit of the stomach might have done.

"What sort of cash bonus?" was the question.

"One hundred thousand dollars!" was the cool rejoinder.

CHAPTER XI

THE WITCHERY OF YGERNE

CHARLIE MADDEN of the Canadian Mining Company wasn't the man to squander time which might be valuable in idle surmises. Ten minutes after leaving Drennen he had sent a man on horseback scurrying down the hundred miles of trail to Lebarge. The man carried a letter to the General Manager. The letter ran in part:

". . . I don't know whether the man is crazy or not. Having seen his specimens I'm rather inclined to think he's not. But he's fool enough to have shown the stuff before filing on his claim. Send me Luke and Berry and Jernigan on the run. Drennen is laid up with a couple of bullet holes in him. I'll keep him from filing as long as I can; the rest is up to the men you send me."

Then, his eyes filled with the glint of his purpose, his jaw seeming to grow lean with the determination upon him, Madden made himself as comfortable as conditions permitted in MacLeod's Settlement and settled down to a period of un-

sleeping watchfulness. He took a room at Père Marquette's.

Before the crowd in the camp had thronged Joe's Lunch Counter toward evening the fever of excitement had grown into a delirium. Madden hadn't talked; Drennen hadn't talked. And yet the word flew about mysteriously that Drennen had asked ten per cent of the stock of his mine and a hundred thousand dollars cash! "God! He had driven his pick into the mother lode of the world!" That was the thing which many men said in many ways, over and over and over again. The Canadian Mining Company was trying to frame a deal with him; Madden had rushed a man to Lebarge with some sort of message; two other big mining concerns had their representatives in town. And Drennen hadn't filed on his claim; the gold lay somewhere in the mountains offering itself to whatever man might find it. A man who could not buy his own grubstake to-day might "own the earth" to-morrow.

Before darkness came MacLeod's Settlement, seething with restless humanity for a few hours, was again pouring itself out into the wilderness in many erratic streams. And no man left who had not first gone by Père Marquette's and seen the nuggets which the old man had put into his one glass-topped show case, and no man but carried the picture of them dancing before his

eyes as he went. Kootanie George, who had had no word for Ernestine Dumont since she had shamed him, went with them. Ramon Garcia, having kissed Ernestine Dumont's hand, went with them. And, oddly enough, Kootanie George and Ramon Garcia went together as trail pardners.

The one man who evinced no concern at what was going on was David Drennen. His calm was like that of a chip caught and held motionless for a little in the centre of a whirlpool while scores of other chips gyrated madly about him; himself the pivot about which all rotated while he seemed unmoved. There were hundreds of sharp-eyed old prospectors looking for the thing he had found; if they in turn found it it would become theirs and be lost to him.

The Settlement saw more strangers in a week than it had ever seen in the days of its existence before. The rare opportunity was given to take stock first hand of men of whom it had talked many times, men whose names meant something. Such a man was Charlie Madden with the fresh cheeks and the way of an old captain of industry. Such was the man who came in behalf of the north-western company. A man between fifty and sixty, big bodied, stalwart, stern faced, silent tongued. An old prospector from the outside put an end to much speculation by informing a knot of men that this was old Marshall Sothern; the name carried

weight and brought fresh interest. Such a man was Ben Hasbrook, little and dried up and nervous mannered, a power in the network of ramifications of a big corporation having its head in Quebec, its tail in Vancouver, its claws everywhere throughout Canada. These men spelled big interests; these were the lions come to wrest away the prey which the pack of wolves was ravening for.

Ben Hasbrook trod almost in Charlie Madden's footsteps going to Drennen; he came away almost immediately, tugging at his beard, hot-eyed and wrathful. Marshall Sothern, having had a word with Père Marquette, a word with Lunch Counter Joe, having seen Hasbrook's retreat, frowned thoughtfully and postponed any interview he may have desired with No-luck Drennen. He paid for a room at Joe's for a week in advance, went into solitary session, smoking his blackened pipe thoughtfully, his powerful fingers beating a long tattoo upon the sill of the window through which his eyes could find Drennen's dugout. With full square beard, iron grey hair, massive countenance, there was something leonine about Marshall Sothern. It appeared reasonable that if he were going into the battle against Madden and Hasbrook, then Madden and Hasbrook would need their wits about them. He seemed at once gifted with infinite patience and unalterable will.

He did not move from his window until he had seen David Drennen come out of his dugout, making his slow way to supper at Joe's. Sothern's eyes, as keen as knife blades, studied the dark face, probing deep for a knowledge of the man himself. It was as though he were making his first move in the game from ambush, as though he felt that the most important thing in the world just now were a thorough understanding of the man with whom he must deal. He had had Marquette's estimate and Joe's . . . now he sought to form his own. . . .

There was a hard smile upon Sothern's face as Drennen passed on, a smile not without a strange sort of satisfaction, flashing a quick light into the eyes.

"By God, I like him!" he burst out softly. "So you're David Drennen, are you? Well, my boy, the hounds of hell are after you . . . that's in your face. But it's in your face, too, that you can stand on your own feet. Hm. In this game I'm going to keep an eye on Madden and Hasbrook, and both eyes on you."

But, despite the dynamic possibilities of action and strife and history making, the days went by without event. Drennen came his three times daily to Joe's for his meals, spent the major part of his time in his dugout or taking short, lonely walks up and down the river, coaxing back his strength. He

saw much of Lemarc and Sefton upon the street, noting that they, like himself, had stayed behind, letting the other fools go on their fools' errands, sensing that their craft bade them linger to watch him. He saw Ygerne several times, always from a distance, and made no attempt to speak with her. He saw Madden, Ben Hasbrook and Marshall Sothern, grew accustomed to the knowledge that they were playing their waiting game, not unlike Sefton and Marc Lemarc, and gave them little attention. They didn't interest him; when he was ready he would deal with them and until that time came need not waste his thoughts upon them.

But all of the stubborn will of a David Drennen could not keep his mind away from Ygerne Bellaire though he held his feet back from taking him to her, though he drove his eyes away from her. He had let down the bars once for her to come into his life as he had let them down for no man or other woman in years. He had yielded to a mood, thinking that it was only a mood and that so far as he was concerned she would cease to exist when he willed it. He found himself, however, seeking to explain her presence here, companioned by such men as Marc Lemarc and Captain Sefton; he sought to construct the story of her life before she had come into this land where women from her obvious station in life did not come; he wrestled with the enigma of her char-

acter, unconsciously striving to find extenuation for the evil he deemed was in her.

"We are a bad lot here," he muttered once after long puzzling. "A bad lot. Some of us are bad because we are weak and the world has tempted. Some of us are bad because we are strong and the world has driven. Some of us are cruel, like steel; some of us are treacherous, like poison. Where do you fit in, Ygerne Bellaire?"

Once only had he met her face to face on the street, many men marking their meeting. Coming unexpectedly upon her he had been tugged two ways by his emotions, a division and sign of weakness which was no usual thing in him. But he had caught a quick expression upon her face in time, and had seen that she was going to pass him with no sign of recognition. He had deliberately turned his back upon her. He had heard a man laugh, and a little spurt of venomous pleasure leaped up in his heart as he knew that she too had heard and as he pictured the blood whipped into her face.

And now again he came upon her all unexpectedly; this time she was alone and there were no men near to see. He stopped, staring down at her insolently. She was sitting upon a fallen log, a mile from the Settlement down the Little MacLeod, her eyes fixed upon the racing water with that expression which tells that they see nothing of what is before them. She had not heard him un-

til he came quite close to her. She started as she looked up, ready upon the instant to leap to her feet. Then she settled back quite calmly, an insolence in her eyes not unlike his. She waited for him to speak, and presently, again conscious of the tugging two ways, he did so.

"There's a man in camp named Charlie Madden," he said with a viciousness which evidently puzzled her until he had gone on. "You've met him, I dare say?"

"Yes," she answered coolly. "He asked me to have dinner with him last night."

Drennen's laugh jeered at her.

"You don't burn daylight, do you?" he sneered. "The man has money; he is young; he looks quite the pink-cheeked, impressionable pup, as good as a gilded youth on Broadway. How did he accept the wonder tale of the virgin purity of your red lips, Ygerne?"

"I didn't accept his invitation," she retorted as coolly as before.

"Why not?" he said sharply, a little hotly. "Couldn't you tell that the fool has money?"

"I didn't like him," she said.

"Ho, you didn't like him!" His tone drove a little higher colour into her face, but she kept the serene indifference in her half-smile. "But you did dine with me . . . because you liked me, no doubt!"

"Let us say," she replied a trifle wearily, her eyes going back to the river, "that I was lonely; and that I was prepared to like you, Mr. Drennen."

He found himself in a sudden flaring anger. The anger was unreasonable, but it but burned the hotter for all that. He had sought to take a joy out of being brutal to the girl, just why he was very far from understanding. Now the joy did not come as he had expected it. In his anger there was a sense of insane resentment against her that she was just a girl, not a man as he would have her now so that he might give her the lie and make her suffer physically by beating at her with his hard fists. In the blind rage upon him he blamed her for having come into his life at all even though she were merely a passing figure through a little corner of it. The years, while they had brought no happiness to him, had at least given him a calm indifference to all things; now for many days and nights she had broken that calm. In his heart he cursed her, his emotion rising toward a fierce, passionate hatred.

"In hell's name," he cried abruptly, his voice ringing with a new menace in it, "what are you doing here? Why don't you go on? What are you staying here for? Is the world so damned small that you've got to come and preen yourself under my eyes?"

For a moment she did not answer. The expression in the eyes turned upon him changed swiftly. There was a quick fear, gone in a flash in pure wonder. All this he saw clearly as too he saw a flicker of amusement. And back of the amusement which maddened him were other things, emotions hinted darkly, baffling him.

"The other day," she said steadily in the face of his rage, "you contented yourself by commanding me to take myself off of the mountain back there. Now you request me to get out of Canada? Or out of America? Or the western hemisphere, which is it? And, kind sir, *why* is it?"

Looking up at him, to show him how little he moved her, to make him doubt if he had read aright when he had thought it was fear in her eyes, she laughed. The laughter, welling up softly, musically, from deep in the round white throat, the defiant posture, head thrown back, something of the vague, sweet intimacy in it, affected him strangely. His face reddened. His hands shut spasmodically, clenching hard, lifting a little from his sides. Instinctively she drew back, her own hand slipping into her bosom, a quick flutter of fear in her heart that he was actually going to strike her.

"Why?" His lips were drawn back from his teeth; his face was more evil in the grip of the passion upon him than she had ever seen it

before; his voice harsh and ugly. "Because you come when you do now, a thousand years too soon or a dozen years too late! Because I hate you as I have never learned how to hate a man no matter what thing he had done! I don't know what there is in me that is stronger than I am and that makes me keep my hands off your throat. Do you know what you have done, Ygerne, with the infernal witchery of you? You have made me love you, me, David Drennen, who knows there is no such thing as love in a rotten world! I want you in my arms; I want to kiss that red mouth of yours; I want to kill any man who so much as looks at you! My life was as I would have it; in a few days I would be a rich man with all of the power of a rich man; . . . and then you came. Why do I hate you, your eyes, your mouth, your body and your brain? Why?" He broke off in a laugh which showed what his wounds, his sickness, his passion had done for him, and she drew still further back from him, shuddering. "I hate you. . . . By God! because you've made of me a fool like the others! because you have made me love you!"

A frenzy of delirium was upon him. She did not know whether the man were sane or not; he did not care. But he knew that he spoke the truth. Twice had he yielded to her, and he was not the man to yield easily. Once, and he had

thought it a passing light mood, when he had let down the bars for her to come in. Now that recklessly he flung open the flood gates which had dammed his own emotions, allowing the headlong torrent to sweep away everything with it. It was madness; it was folly; it was insanity for a man like David Drennen to let his heart be snared out of him by the girl upon whom he had looked so few times. And yet, be it what else it might be, it was the simple truth.

"Laugh at me, why don't you?" snarled the man, little beads of perspiration gathered on his forehead. "Or blush and stammer any of the idiotic things which a woman says to the man at the moment of his supreme idiocy. Or flatter yourself with the vanity of it. Are you a good woman or a bad? I don't know. Are you generous or mean? I don't know. Are you loyal and stanch and true—or treacherous and contemptible? I don't know. I don't know a thing about you, and yet I let you slip into my life one day and the next rile up all of the mud which was settling to the bottom. Go and brag of it to your two hangdogs. But, by heaven," and his fist smashed down into an open palm, "you and your dogs keep out of my way. If the three of you are here another twenty-four hours I'll drive them out and with them any other man you so much as look at!"

He stared at her for a moment, grown suddenly

silent and white faced. He lifted his arms as though he would sweep her up into them. Then he dropped them so that they fell to his side like dead weights and swung about, turning his back upon her, going swiftly upstream toward the Settlement.

Across the river came the call of a robin. A splash of blue fire in the willows was a blue bird's wing. A solitary butterfly made a half circle about him, passing close to him as though to beat him back with its delicate, diaphanous wings. The pale yellowish buds everywhere were changing to a lusty verdant. Air and grass were filled with questing insect life thrilling upward with little voices. The snows were slipping, slipping from the mountainsides, the waters rising in river and lake. The sap was astir in shrub and tree, bursting upward joyously. Nature had breathed her soft command to all of the North Woods; every creature and thing of life in the North Woods had heard the call.

CHAPTER XII

MERE BRUTE . . . OR JUST PLAIN MAN?

YGERNE, sitting very still, watched Drennen until he had passed around a bend in the river and was lost to her sight behind a clump of willows. His impassioned outburst had been too frenzied not to have moved her powerfully. But the expression in the eyes which followed him was too complex to give any key to the one emotion standing above the others in her breast. When she could see him no longer she rose and followed slowly.

Because the course of the Little MacLeod is full of twists and kinks, spine of ridge and depression of ravine thrusting the stream aside or welcoming it closer, she had no further view of him until they were both near the Settlement, Drennen himself already abreast of the first building at this end of the camp, his own dugout. She thought that he was going to stop at his cabin; then she saw that he had passed on. She had suspected that the man was delirious with the fever upon him; that his brain had reeled from the impact

of the blows showered upon it and had staggered from its throne. Now the suspicion came to her that Drennen had come to her in his cups; that the thing which had loosened his tongue and distorted his vision was nothing more nor less than whiskey.

He was lurching as he walked, but bearing on swiftly. She had not been mistaken when she had thought that he had turned in toward his cabin. But in this his action had been involuntary. He had reeled, had paused as he caught and steadied himself, had gone on drunkenly.

There were a score of men up and down the short street. Already some of them had marked his coming. Ygerne turned hurriedly to the left, put the line of houses between her and the street, passing back doors quickly on her way to Père Marquette's.

Only once did Drennen stop. He ran his hand across his eyes as though to brush away some filmy fogginess of vision. There was impatience in the gesture. With a little grunt of satisfaction he went on. He had seen both Lemarc and Sefton talking with other men half way up the street.

As he passed Joe's he was lurching more and more, his walk grown markedly unsteady. His eyes were flaming and growing red; his face was splotched with colour, hot, angry colour; he was

muttering to himself, little broken, feverish, illogical outpourings of the seething passion within him. He passed three men who were lounging and smoking. He did not turn his eyes toward them. They were the three big mining men, Madden and Hasbrook and Sothern. They saw him, their eyes following him quickly, each man with his own personal interest.

"Drunk, eh?" laughed Charlie Madden. "Suppose we draw straws to see who takes him in tow!"

Hasbrook's sharp featured face grew shrewd in speculation, his tongue clicking nervously. Marshall Sothern's shaggy brows lowered a bit; Madden and Hasbrook had looked from Drennen to each other and to him; he alone kept his eyes hard upon the man making his way with unsteady stubbornness up the street.

When a man stood in his way Drennen thrust out his arm, pushing him aside. His eyes grew ever the more terrible with the madness of the rage upon him, bloodshot and menacing. They lost Lemarc and Sefton, wandered uncertainly across the blurr of faces, glowered triumphantly as again they found the men he sought.

He drew up with a little jerk, not ten steps from the two men who as usual were standing close together. Such had been the strange impressiveness of his approach that now he was greeted by a deep

silence. The only sound was his own hard breathing, then his words when he burst out violently.

As though his tongue were a poisoned whip he lashed them with it. Burning denunciation exploding within his heated brain was flung off in words to bite like spraying vitriol. His voice rose higher, shriller, grown more and more discordant. He cursed them until the blood ran into Lemarc's cheeks and seeped out of Sefton's. And when at last words failed and he choked a moment he flung himself upon them, bellowing inarticulate, half-smothered wrath.

Men drew back from before him. It was not their fight and they knew how and when to shrug their shoulders and watch. Lemarc, running his hand under his coat for his knife, was struck down before the hand could come in sight again. Drennen's searching fist had found the man's forehead and the sound of the blow was like a hammer beating against rock. Either Sefton had no arms upon him or had not the time to draw. He could only oppose his physical strength against the physical strength of a man who was an Antæus from the madness and blood lust upon him. Sefton's white face went whiter, chalky and sick as Drennen's long arms encircled his body. Lemarc was rising slowly, his knife at last in his hand when Sefton's body, hurled far out, struck the ground.

Drennen was not fighting as a man fights.

Rather were his actions those of some enraged, cautionless beast. Rushing at Lemarc he beat fiercely at a man who chanced to stand in his way, and the man went down. Lemarc was on his feet now, his knife lifted. And yet Drennen, bare handed, was rushing on at him. Sefton was up too, and there was a revolver in his hand. But Drennen, snarling, his fury blind and raging higher, took no heed of the weapon's menace. The thing in Lemarc's eyes, in Sefton's, was the thing a man must know when he sees it; and yet Drennen came on.

But another man saw and understood before it was too late. Marshall Sothern who had followed Drennen with long strides, was now close to his side. The old man's stalwart form moved swiftly, coming between Drennen and Sefton. With a quickness which men did not look for in a man of his age, with a strength which drove up from those who saw a little grunt of wonder, he put out his great arms so that they were about Drennen's body, below his shoulders, catching his arms and holding them tight against his ribs.

"Stop!" burst out Sothern's deep-lunged roar. "Can't you see the man is sick? By God, I'll kill any man who lays a hand on him!"

Speaking he hurled his greater weight against Drennen, driving him back. Perhaps just then

the strength began to run out of the younger man's body; or perhaps some kindred frenzy was upon Marshall Sothern. Drennen, struggling and cursing, gave back; back another step; and then, wilting like a cut flower, went down, the old man falling with and upon him. As they fell Drennen lay still, his eyes roving wonderingly from face to face of the men crowding over him. Then his gaze came curiously to the face so near his own, the stern, powerful face of Sothern. An odd smile touched Drennen's lips fleetingly; he put out a freed arm so that it fell about Sothern's shoulders, his eyes closed and consciousness went out of him with a sigh.

"Bring him over to Marquette's."

It was Charlie Madden's voice. Madden and Hasbrook were crowding their way close to the two men in the centre of the group, but little behind Sothern in keeping their eyes upon the man because of whom they were here, for whom they were prepared to fight jealously.

"Stand back!"

Sothern's answer. He had risen, stooped a little, gathered Drennen up in his arms. After the way of men at such a time there was no giving back, rather a growing denseness of the packed throng.

"Don't you hear me?" boomed Sothern angrily. "I say stand back!"

Those directly in front of him, under his eyes, drew hesitantly aside, stepping obediently to right or left. Carrying his burden with a strength equal to that of a young Kootanie George, Marshall Sothern made his way through the narrow lane they made for him. But he did not turn toward Père Marquette's.

"Where are you taking him?" demanded Madden suspiciously, again forcing his way to Sothern's elbow. "That's not the way . . ."

"I'm taking him to his own home," said Sothern calmly. "The only home he's got, his dugout."

"Oho," cried Madden, suspicion giving place to certainty and open accusation, while Hasbrook, combing at his beard, was muttering in a like tone. "You'll take him off to yourself, will you? Where you can do as you damned please with him? Not much."

Marshall Sothern merely shook his head and moved on, thrusting Madden to one side with his heavy shoulder. He was carrying Drennen as one might carry a baby, an arm about the shoulders, an arm under the knees. Men offered to help him but he paid no heed to them. Leonine the man always looked; to-day he looked the lion bearing off a wounded whelp to its den.

Expostulating, Madden dogged his heels, the rest following. Lemarc and Sefton, speaking together, had dropped far behind; Hasbrook was

close to Madden's elbow. So they passed down the street. Ygerne Bellaire, standing now in front of Marquette's, watched them wonderingly.

Sothern came first to the dugout. The door being open, he passed in without stopping. He laid the inert form down gently and came back to the door.

"Well?" he demanded, his steady eyes going to Madden.

Madden laughed sneeringly.

"If you think I'm going to stand for a high-handed play like this," he jeered, "you're damned well mistaken. You're not the only man who's got an interest in him. He doesn't belong to you, old man."

"They'd have killed him if it hadn't been for me," returned Sothern imperturbably. "Until he's on his feet and in his mind again he does belong to me. We haven't the pleasure of knowing each other very well, Charlie. But I can give you my word that when I say a thing I mean it. If you don't believe it . . . start something."

He stepped outside, closing the door after him softly. He brought out his pipe, knocked the dead tobacco from it and filled it afresh, lighting it before Madden and Hasbrook, consulting together in an undertone, had found anything to say. His eyes were calm and steady; there was even a hint of a smile in them as they rested upon Madden's

eager, angry face. There had been no threat in his last words. But he had meant them.

There was but one door to the dugout; it was closed, and more than that, Marshall Sothern stood calmly in front of it. Drennen was inside and he was going to stay there. Madden muttered something; Sothern lifted his brows enquiringly and Madden did not repeat. The situation being neither without interest or humour, some of the men laughed. Madden considered swiftly: Drennen was unconscious; Sothern could do nothing with him immediately. He drew Hasbrook aside and the two went slowly up the street.

Sothern beckoned a man he knew in the crowd, a little fellow named Jimmie Andrews.

"Get a horse," he said quietly. "I want you to carry a couple of letters to Lebarge for me. If you can't get a horse any other way buy one. Come back as soon as you're ready to start. I'll have the letters ready."

He turned back into the dugout, closed the door and dropped the wooden bar into place. Jimmie Andrews went hastily after a horse and twenty minutes later rode out of MacLeod's Settlement, headed for the railroad. He carried a letter to the Superintendent of the Northwestern. The second letter was addressed to Dr. Thos. Levitt.

During the two days which followed the Settlement went tip-toe. No man of them saw David

Drennen except now and then through the door when Marshall Sothern had opened it for the warm midday air. There were men in the street who offered wagers that he was going to die and, what was more to the point, that he would die without telling where he had found gold. Sothern ministered to him day and night, letting no one in, having his own meals sent here, sitting by the bunk or at the doorstep, smoking. When a passer-by asked, "How's he gettin' along?" Sothern's answer was always the same: "Slowly."

Drennen had been through much privation and hardship before his discovery, severe bodily punishment and fatigue thereafter. On top of physical suffering had been imposed the mental stress, the veritable mad agony and strife of the dual emotions which Ygerne had inspired in him. It was in the cards that he should come near death; but that he should not die. A man's destiny is characterised at times by an instinct of savagery; it tortures him until his sense of pain is dulled and lost in unconsciousness; then it lets him grow strong again for fresh tortures.

After the forty-eight hours had passed Jimmie Andrews had returned bringing the physician with him. Dr. Levitt had stayed twenty-four hours and had gone again, saying that there was nothing for him to do that Sothern could not do as well. He

rather thought that Drennen's beautiful physique would pull him through. But it would take time, careful attention, rest and properly administered nourishment.

"Can't you get a woman to help?" he asked as he was going. "I don't give a damn what kind she is. One fool of a woman is worth a dozen men at times like this." He pocketed his fee, bestowed upon Sothern a gratuitous wink with the words, "I guess it's a good investment for you, eh? Madden and Hasbrook look as sore as saddle boils."

Drennen slept much but restlessly. When he was awake he stared with clouded, troubled eyes at the smoke-blackened ceiling or out of the door at the willows or into Sothern's rugged face. His fever raged high, his body burning with it, his brain a turbulent melting pot wherein strange fancies passed through odd, vaporous forms. He confused events of a far-off childhood with occurrences of yesterday. He was a little boy, gone black-berrying, and Ygerne Bellaire went with him. His dugout was a cabin in the Yukon where he had lived a year, or it was a speeding train carrying him away from an old home and into the wilderness. There were times when Marshall Sothern, bending over him, was an enemy, torturing him. Times when the old man was his own father and Drennen put out his hands to him, his

face alight. Times when the sick man cursed and reviled him. Times when he broke into shouting song or laughter or raved of his gold. But most often did he speak the name Ygerne; now tenderly, now sneeringly, now with a love that yearned, now a hatred which shook him terribly and left him exhausted.

The doctor had gotten back to Lebarge before Marshall Sothern sent for Ygerne. She came without delay.

"This man is very sick," he told her, bending a searching look at her from under brows shaggy in thought. "He talks of you very much. Does he love you or does he hate you?"

She looked at him coolly, her gaze defying him to pry into matters which did not concern him. He understood the look and said calmly:

"I want him to get well. There are reasons why he has got to get well."

"I know," she laughed at him. "Good, golden reasons!"

"If he loves you, as I have a mind he does," Sothern went on quietly, "I think that you could do more to help him than any one else. If he hates you you might do more harm than good. That is why I asked."

"He is delirious?"

"A great deal of the time; not always."

Her brows puckered thoughtfully.

"I think," she said at last, "that he loves me and hates me . . . both! But I'll come in and see if I can be of any help. I, too, have good reasons for wanting him to live."

So the door to Drennen's dugout was opened to Ygerne Bellaire. But to no one else in the Settlement; Marshall Sothern saw to that. Madden came, Hasbrook came; but they did not get their feet across the rude threshold. They grumbled, Madden in particular. They accused Sothern of taking an unfair advantage; of keeping the delirious man under his own eye and ear that he might seek to steal his secret from him; of plotting with Ygerne to aid in the same end. But, say what they might outside, they did not come in.

"We'll see which is the greater, his love for me or his hate," the girl had said. She sat down by the bed, laying her hand softly upon the bared arm which Drennen had flung out. He turned, looking at her with frowning eyes. In silence she waited. Sothern, standing by the door, his eyes watchful as they passed back and forth from her face to Drennen's, was silent. For a score of seconds Drennen's gaze was unfaltering. Then, with a little sigh, he drew her hand close to him, rested his cheek against it and went to sleep. Sothern, looking now at the girl's face, saw it flush as though with pleasure.

Now she was at the dugout almost as much as Marshall Sothern. The long hours of the day she spent at the bedside, going to her own room only when it grew dark. And even in the night, once Sothern sent for her. Drennen had called for her; had grown violent when she was denied to him and would not be quieted when Sothern sought to reason with him. So Ygerne, dressing hurriedly, her sweater about her, came.

"Why do you come to me that way?"

Drennen had lifted himself upon his elbow, calling out angrily.

"What do you mean?" she asked wondering.

"In that miserable sweater!" he cried. "That's good enough for other women, not for you."

And he made her go back and put on the dress she had worn that night when she had dined with him. She argued with him but he insisted. He would have none of her in her sweater.

"Oh, well," she said, and went out. Sothern thought that she had gone for good. His eyes narrowed and stared speculatively when in a little she came in again. Drennen smiled, openly approved of the Ygerne whom he had sought to kiss, took her hands, kissed them and holding them grew quiet.

He grew stronger almost steadily after that. He had much fever and delirium, but his wounds healed and he ceased to lose ground as he had

been doing. In his ravings he made much passionate love to Ygerne, his tones running from the gentleness of supplication to the flame of hot avowal. In lucid moments of sanity he accepted her presence as a quite natural condition, too utterly exhausted by the periods of delirium through which he had passed to ask questions. A few times, indeed, he railed at her as he had done when he had come upon her on the river bank. But for the most part his attitude answered over and over the question Ygerne had implied when first she had come to his side; his love was greater than his hate.

Then there came a day when David Drennen was the old David Drennen once more. He awoke with clear eyes and clear brain. He saw both Marshall Sothern and Ygerne Bellaire. He closed his eyes swiftly. He must think. As he thought, remembering a little, guessing more, a hard smile, the old bitter smile came to his lips. He opened his eyes again and lifted himself upon his elbow. The eyes which met Sothern's were as hard as steel; they ignored the girl entirely.

"I've been sick?" he said coolly. "Well, I'm not sick any longer. In a day or so I'll be around again. Then I'll pay you for your trouble."

And seeing from the look in Sothern's eyes that the rude insult had registered he laughed and turned his face away from them. Sothern and the

girl stepped outside together, without a word.

"He is just plain brute!" the girl cried with passionate contempt.

The old man shook his head gravely. He laid his hand very gently upon her shoulder, his unexpected familiarity drawing a quick questioning look from her.

"Little girl," he said thoughtfully, "he's just plain man, that's all; man hammered and beaten awry by the vicious little gods of mischance. If there's anything good left in him it's his love for you. There is a time coming when I am going to wield the destinies of one of the greatest corporations in the West. My responsibility then, compared to yours now, will be as a grain of sand to Old Ironhead up yonder."

CHAPTER XIII

YGERNE'S ANSWER

"The perfume of roses, of little red roses;
(Thou art a rose, oh, so sweet, *corazón!*)"
The laugh of the water who falls in the fountain;
(Thou art the fountain of love, *corazón!*)
The brightness of stars, of little stars golden;
(*Estrella de mi vida!* My little life star!)
The shine of the moon through the magnolia tree;
I am so sad till thou come, *mi amor!*
Dios! It is sweet to be young and to love!
More sweet than wine . . . to be young and to love!"

THERE was tenderness in the voice. Each note was like the pure sound of a little gold bell struck softly with a tiny golden hammer.

There had been determination in David Drennen's eye, in his carriage, in his stride which swiftly bore him onward through the early night from his own dugout toward the old Frenchman's store. Not fifty steps from Marquette's he stopped abruptly, listening to the soft singing. It was not so dark that he could not make out the slender,

exquisite form of the young Mexican. Ramon Garcia, wrapped about in his long coat like a cavalier in a graceful cloak, his face lifted a little, his head bared, was close to a certain window of Père Marquette's. Drennen knew whose window.

With no conscious desire to eavesdrop, merely stopped by an unforeseen contingency, Drennen stood still. Garcia, his eyes upon a line of light under the window shade, did not see him. It was hardly more than an instant that Drennen stood there, watching; but the little drama was enacted before he moved on.

Slowly, while the last notes were fainting away plaintively, the window was raised. Drennen saw Ygerne Bellaire, half in light, half in shadow. She leaned out. She was laughing softly. Garcia, his bow carrying to the ground his hat which in the dim light appeared to Drennen's fancy to wear the black plume which would not have been misplaced there, came closer to the window. Upon the girl's face was a gaiety Drennen had not seen there until now; her lips curved to it, her eyes danced with it. She had a little meadow flower in her hand; Drennen wondered if she had been eagerly selecting it from a cluster of its fellows while Garcia sang.

"You are not real, señor," she said lightly. "I wonder if you know that?"

"It is you . . ." he began, his voice charged with the music about which the man's soul was builded.

"No, no," she laughed. "You are not real. You have just wandered out of an old romance like a ghost; when the sun comes up you'll have to creep back between dusty covers of a book a hundred years old."

He put out a hand towards hers on the window sill.

"Give me the little flower," he pleaded, southern lover-wise. "I shall never let it go away from its place on my heart, though I fear," and his hand crept a little closer, "that my heart will burst with the joy of it!"

The little meadow flower went from her fingers to his.

"A flower for your song, señor. A poor little flower which should have golden petals."

"Living," he murmured, no heights or depths of sentiment seeming beyond him, "it shall always be with me, a joy so sweet that it almost kills. Dead, I shall be happy just to wear it."

She laughed as he caught her hand and kissed it. The window closed softly, the shade was drawn down, and Ramon Garcia, hat still in one hand, the flower in the other, passed down the street, still singing in a gentle undertone. Drennen turned abruptly at right angles to the way he

had come and passed out of the Settlement into the darkness under the trees.

Swiftness and determination had gone out of his stride. Unconsciously he allowed his feet to carry him along a well known trail which led along the flank of the wooded slope. Once or twice he stopped. Then again he moved on, always further from the Settlement.

He was well again and strong. Rest and nature had done all they could for him in a handful of long, quiet days. He was still twenty pounds lighter than he should be normally, but he had both feet firmly set in a smooth highway of convalescence. The mental and spiritual roadways were not so smooth or straight.

He had seen much of Ygerne of late. He had come to know that, wise man or fool, he loved her. They had met frequently, at Joe's, upon the short street, in their walks up and down the river. They had not spoken of all that had gone before and there had been as much silence as talk between them. He continued to tell himself coolly that he knew nothing of her, that she might be good or bad, loyal or treacherous. But he knew that he did not hate her and that he did love her. He knew that he was not angry because she had come into his life but that he was glad.

He knew to-night that his whole spiritual being was made simply of two elements: of love, which

is a white flame in a man like Drennen; of jealousy, which is a black shadow. He had been on his way to her, his mind made up that he would not sleep without telling her of his love. The sight of Garcia had halted him. Garcia's singing to her had awakened a fierce anger within him; his flesh had twitched and something had seemed to sear hot through it as Garcia's lips touched her hand.

Now he tried to look at these matters calmly. He knew that in the fury which had sent him at Lemarc and Sefton before Marshall Sothern had gathered up his limp body the driving force had been jealousy. He knew that even then, in his delirium, he wanted her all to himself.

Less than a month had passed since first he had seen her and he did not now know what manner of woman she was. But he did know that that does not matter. His fate had driven him into the North Woods ten years ago that he might be here when she came; her destiny had brought her to MacLeod's Settlement from New Orleans to him. Because the greatest of all laws lies hidden under a clutter of little things that law is none the less great or real. He had grown to see as a miraculous manifestation of this law even the fact that he and Ygerne Bellaire had been born in the same generation. . . . Stern-minded men of science, whose creed is to doubt all things until they are proven in such wise as an objective brain

can accept them as incontrovertible, see no miracle in the fact that a certain female moth, left alone upon a mountain top, will draw to herself a male mate from mountainous miles away. Even in the insect world there is a silent call which is a voice of destiny. Omnipotence is not above concerning itself with the embrace of two tiny, fragile-winged creatures in the darkness of the solitudes. Surely there is an urge and yearning of human souls which knows not distance and obstacles, which brings together man and his mate.

These were strange, new thoughts to David Drennen and yet they came naturally as an old knowledge set aside, half forgotten, ultimately vividly recalled. He loved Ygerne; she must love him. Therein alone could lie the explanation of his presence here and of hers. When he had quitted his dugout this evening there had been more than determination in his heart; there had been confidence.

And now? He wandered aimlessly. Determination and confidence had both left him. Garcia had sung to her and the singing had pleased. Garcia had made love to her in his song and she had thrown open her window. Garcia had kissed her hand and she had given him a flower.

Deep in his troubled thoughts Drennen had stopped a third time. He was in thick shadow and saw two figures that had followed him. He made

out that here were Lemarc and Sefton as they came on, cautiously and silently. This thing was to be expected; these men were plucking with greedy fingers as fortune's robe and for such as they he was one to be watched. He saw them pass on along the trail; his still form in the shadows was blotted out from them by the tall boles of the trees. His eyes followed them a moment, then lost them. Already he had forgotten them. His thoughts went back to Ygerne Bellaire, to the scene at the window.

The moon pushed a great golden disc up over the ridge. It was at the full and made glorious patterns of light through the forest. Little voices of the night which he had not heard until now began to thrill and quiver under the soft light. It was as though the North Woods were filled with a secret, pigmy people who were moon worshippers; as though now they greeted their goddess with an elfin chant of praise.

A strange sadness fastened itself upon the man. The beauty of the night touched him deeply. It brought with its stillness an unaccustomed emotion of melancholy. He was suddenly lonely. The night was rarely perfect and yet it wanted something. It was complete yet it was empty. The moonrise, the golden glory of stars set against the soft bosom of the sky, brought a sense of lack of something. It touched the soul and yet

did not satisfy. It awoke a sort of soul thirst and hunger in him. Upon him was the old yearning, the yearning of the man for his mate, that longing experienced never so poignantly as in a spot like this where a man is alone with the woodland.

Dimly conscious of many emotions mingled and confused, David Drennen was keenly awake to the sweeping alteration which a few days had effected in him. Not that he fully understood that which he recognised. He was inclined to look upon himself as a different man; like many a man before him whom love or hate, a great joy or a great disaster, had appeared to make over, he was but experiencing the sensation resultant from the emancipation of a certain portion of his being which had existed always until now in a state of bondage, silent and hidden.

He stood a long time, very still. So motionless that when the moon had driven the shadows back and found him out he looked a brother to the inanimate objects about him. But when at last he moved, while slowly, it was without hesitation. He was going to Ygerne.

Marquette's store was closed, the doors locked. There was a light from Ygerne's window, another light from a second window, Madden's room. Drennen passed about the house and came to the door of the living room. There was no light shining under the door, but he knocked. In a little

Mère Jeanne, a wrap thrown about her, came in answer.

"May I see Miss Bellaire?" he said simply. "Will you tell her that it is important?"

Mère Jeanne looked at him shrewdly, with little hesitation made up her mind that he came as a lover, left him at the door and went to the girl. A moment later Ygerne entered the little living room. Drennen stepped across the threshold.

"I wanted to talk with you," he said gravely.

The girl shot a quick, curious look at him and went to a chair.

"Will you come outside with me?" he asked quietly. "It is quite a private matter. We can walk up and down in the moonlight, just outside."

A moment she seemed to hesitate. Then she shook her head.

"We are alone here," she replied. "What is it?"

"It is many things, Ygerne." He closed the outside door and stood with his back to it, his eyes very steady upon hers. A sudden pulsing of blood coursed through him but he held himself steady, forcing his voice to remain grave and quiet. "To begin with I want to apologise to you for having been a brute to you since I first saw you. If you can't find it in your heart to make any excuses for

me at least you can know that I am both sorry and ashamed of myself."

Again she shot that quick, questioning glance at him. She felt as he had felt: "This is some new David Drennen."

"You know me pretty well," he went on. "Better than I know you, I think. I am a man whose name has been dragged through a lot of muck and mire. I am the son of a thief. My father was without honour. God knows how good or how bad I am. My life for ten years has been an ugly thing, a good deal more evil than good. If you are the sort of woman I like to think you are, then I suppose that my presence here is little less than an insult to you, though God knows I don't mean it to be."

He paused. She watched him as before, save that now a quick light of understanding had come into her eyes, a faint flush to her cheeks. Like Mère Jeanne, she had glimpsed the lover in the man—he couldn't know that already he had told her all that he had come to say; but she knew.

"I told you the truth the other day, Ygerne. That day when I went mad. I love you. I'd like to be another sort of man, a better sort, coming to tell you this. But if I were a better man I couldn't love you any better."

Despite the surety that the words were coming

they must have brought a little shock to her. She rose swiftly, her hands coming up from her sides until they clasped each other in front of her.

"I didn't believe in love until you came, Ygerne. I have never seen such a thing in the life I have lived. You see, to begin with, I thought my father loved me and that I loved him. I was mistaken. I thought I had a friend once and again I was mistaken. But now I know there is such a thing. I want you and you are all that I want in the world. I want you, Ygerne, in a way I did not know a man could want anything. Through you I have come to look at all creation in a new way; it seems to me that there is a God. Am I talking like a madman again? Or just like a fool? . . . I feel sometimes that I love you because I was created for the sole purpose of loving you; that you must love me for the same reason. There are other times when that doesn't seem possible, when I can't conceive of your coming to me as I come to you. But in the end I had to know, Ygerne. Am I a fool? Or do you love me?"

He had made no movement toward her. He stood very still at the door. He had striven with his emotion so that outwardly he mastered it. His voice had remained calm and very steady.

"You said a moment ago," Ygerne answered him, and her voice too was cool almost to the point of indifference, "that you had been a brute

to me. Knowing you as I do, is it likely that I should have come to love you?"

"No," he said.

"Then why do you come to me this way, now?"

"Because I had to come. Because it is not always the likely thing which happens. Because I have thought that we were made for each other, you and I. Because I must know."

He waited for her answer, an answer which he feared she had already given him. He hungered for her so that he could only wonder how he could hold himself back from taking her up into his arms. But he mastered himself so that the girl could not guess how hard he strove for the mastery.

"Is love a little thing or a big thing?" she said suddenly.

"A big thing. I think it is the biggest thing in the world."

"And still, believing that, you think that I am a girl to let you treat me as you have treated me since we first saw each other, and then to come to you when you decide to crook your finger to me, giving you my love? Is that it? Is that why you are here to-night?"

"Is that my answer, Ygerne?" he said, his tone more stern than it had yet been.

"That is no answer at all, Mr. Drennen. It is a question."

His face grew a little white as he stared at her.

"I think, Ygerne, that I shall tell you good night now. And in the morning, before you are up, I'll be gone. All my life I hope I shall never see you again. And you can know that every day of it I'll be mad to see you."

He bent his head to her, turning away, a dull agony in his heart. His hand was upon the knob of the door. Then she came toward him swiftly. Half way across the room she stopped. Suddenly her face was scarlet, her eyes were shining at him like stars. Her beauty was a new beauty, infinitely desirable.

"Were I the man," she said with a voice which shook with the passion in it, "I'd not want my woman to come to me! I'd want to go to her, to take her with my own strength, to hold her with it, to know that she was too proud to yield even when she was burning to be taken!"

"Ygerne!" he said sharply.

There was a sort of defiance in the sudden tensity of her erect body, an imperiousness in the carriage of her head. Her eyes met his with something of the same defiance in them. But in them, too, was a great light.

Drennen came to her swiftly. His arms tightened about her, drawing her so close that each heart felt the other striking against it. She let him hold her so, but even yielding she seemed to

resist. His lips, seeking her red mouth, found it this time. She gave back the passion of his kiss passionately. He felt a thrill through him like an electric current.

"By God, Ygerne," he cried joyously, "we'll make life over now!"

Suddenly she had wrenched herself free of him.

"I didn't love you yesterday," she said pantingly, holding him back at arm's length, her wide, half-frightened eyes upon his. "Will I love you to-morrow? . . . You must go now; go!"

He put out his arms for her but she had run back to the door through which she had come to him. He heard the door close, then another. She had gone to her own room.

Caught up between heaven and hell he made his way homeward. Passing her window he saw that it was dark. He hesitated, then moved on. Suddenly he stopped. He had heard her singing, her voice lilting gaily, quite as though no strong emotion had come into her life to-night. A swift anger vaguely tinged with dread leaped into Drennen's heart. She was humming a line of Garcia's little song:

"Dios! It is sweet to be young and to love!"

CHAPTER XIV

DRENNEN MAKES A DISCOVERY

FOR David Drennen, in whose mouth the husks of life were dry and harsh and bitter, a miracle had happened. Nor was that miracle any the less a golden wonder because to other men in other times it had been the same. Marshall Sothern had been right; the time had come when a woman's responsibilities were to be greater than those of the head of a monster corporation. Banked and covered as it was in the ashes of the after years, there was the old living spark of humanity in David Drennen. Ygerne Bellaire came in time to fan it into a warming glow. The fire which should come from it should be her affair. It would cheer with its warmth; or it should devastate with its flames. The spark, fanned into love's fire, had in an instant sent its flickering light throughout the darker places of a man's being.

A woman, accomplishing that which Ygerne Bellaire had done, is sometimes not unlike a child scat-

tering coals in a dry forestland. The forest, the child itself, may be consumed.

Men who had not called him Drennen the Unlucky had named him Headlong Drennen. His is that type which, in another environment and taking the gamble of life from another angle, is termed a plunger. There was no room for half-heartedness in so positive a nature. Where he loved he worshipped. He had had an idol once before, his father. Now, after half a score of years, he made himself another idol. And it, in turn, made of him another man.

Worship must be unquestioning. It is builded upon utter faith. So Drennen, his slow words spoken to Ygerne, his love for her freed, as it were, from any restraint he had hitherto tried to put upon it, his whole being given over to it, came without question to believe in her. She was the woman meant to be his mate and he had called to her and she had come to him. His moment of doubt had fled with his declaration. Otherwise he would have been the paler personality which it was not in him to be, half-hearted. Of her passion and pride he made character. From the look which he had seen in her eyes he made tenderness and truth. Every attribute of that Ideal which is somewhere in the heart of every man, until at last the one woman comes to occupy its place more sweetly and warmly and intimately, he brought

forth from its dark recess to bestow upon Ygerne.

All night he did not sleep. The sun, rising, found him quite another man than that upon which it had set last night. In men like Drennen a few hours and a strong emotion can accomplish results which in other men would require the passing of years. And the same rising sun showed a new world to the eyes opened eagerly to see it, displayed a fresh universe to a heart starved for it. He had sought to see only the shadows yesterday; now he looked for the light and it was everywhere. It lay quivering upon the mountain tops, it flooded the valleys, it brightened his own heart, it touched the bosoms of other men, it shone in their eyes.

He had shaved and dressed himself neatly. On his way to his early breakfast he met Marshall Sothern on the street. Drennen came to him swiftly, putting out his hand.

"I have been rather a brute and an unqualified boor," he said quietly. "I owe you a very great deal, Mr. Sothern, my life I suppose. I'd like to shake hands."

Sothern looked at him strangely, both sensing and seeing the change in the man. He put out his hand and it settled hard about Drennen's.

"My boy," he said simply, "you have my word for it that you owe me not so much as a word of thanks. You are getting along all right?"

"Yes. So well that I'm off to-day for Lebarge

to file on my claims. I'll not waste any time in getting back. If then you care to look over the property . . ."

The buoyancy within him had been speaking through the vibrant tones of his voice. Suddenly he broke off, his eyes widening to a look of groping wonderment. His jaw had dropped a little, he stood as if frozen in his place, even the hand which Sothern had just released held motionless half way on its brief return journey to his side. In an incredibly short instant he had grown pale; his voice, when he spoke the two words, was harsh and unsteady:

"My God!"

Sothern threw up his hand as though to beat back physically a flow of words.

"Not now!" he commanded sharply. "Wait. Later. . . ."

He had turned abruptly and moved away in a haste which carried him with long strides down the street. Drennen, the rigidity of his body giving way to a little shiver which ran up and down him from shoulders to calves, stared speechlessly after Sothern. His mouth, closed slowly, now opened suddenly as though he were going to call, but no words came. He took one swift step after Sothern, then stopped in an uneasy indecision.

Far down the open roadway he could see Marc Lemarc with Captain Sefton coming into the

Settlement from the direction of the dugout. In front of Marquette's, as he glanced swiftly the other way, he could see Charlie Madden at the doorstep. Joe was at his own door. It seemed to Drennen that they were all looking at him. He turned then, his back toward Sothern, and went to the lunch counter.

Joe asked twice what he would eat before Drennen heard and gave his order. Madden came in while he was stirring the coffee which was growing cold under his vacant eyes, and took a stool near him, studying him none the less keenly because the look was so swift.

"Well, Drennen," he said lightly, "you'll be ready to talk business pretty soon now."

Drennen started.

"Why, good morning, Madden. Yes; yes, I'll be ready to talk business pretty soon."

"You're not still holding out for that ridiculous proposition you made me the other day, are you?"

"Yes. And it isn't ridiculous, Madden. It's worth it."

Madden smiled.

"Look here, Drennen," he said easily, "you can bluff all you like now, but you can't go on bluffing much longer. You'll have to get down to business. Whatever your mine is worth is just what you can ask for it. Hasbrook and Sothern are

both on the job, and they're both good enough old ducks. But they haven't got the companies behind them I've got behind me. They can't get their fingers on the money as I can. And," shrugging his shoulders, "they're old guys and too damned cautious to live. I'll take a gamble. Damn it, I'm always ready for a gamble."

He flipped a check book from his pocket and unscrewed the cap of a pen.

"I'll take a chance," he said sharply. "Right now I'll write you a check for a thousand dollars. That's just for a ninety days' option. We'll clean out of this, go down to Lebarge and file your title. Then we'll see what you've got. Are you on?"

The temptation of the pen against the blue slip of paper was lost to Drennen. While Madden was talking there had again crept into his eyes that look which tells that a man's mind is wandering to other thoughts. Again, with a start, he brought his gaze back to Madden.

"A thousand dollars? An option?" He shook his head. "No."

"Why, man, are you crazy?" Madden's look hinted that Madden half believed he was. "I'm just chucking a thousand dollars at you, throwing it away for the fun of it. . . ."

"I don't want it. And I don't want to be tied up ninety days or nine."

"Have you made a dicker with any one?" queried Madden suspiciously. "Old Sothern has had you all to himself. . . . Did you tie up with him?"

"No."

"Then, can't you see, I'm the man you want to deal with?"

"I don't think so," Drennen replied thoughtfully.

"Why not?" Madden's check book was snapping against the counter as though its voice cried out with his.

"Because I think I'm going to sell to the Northwestern!"

"But," cried Madden angrily, "you just told me that Sothern hadn't . . ."

"He hasn't!" Drennen grinned. "He doesn't know it yet!"

And that was all that Charlie Madden, though he pleaded and waxed wroth, could get out of him.

Drennen, passing out, nodded pleasantly to Marc Lemarc, coming in. Lemarc stared after him wonderingly. Drennen looked up and down the street as though searching for some one. His eyes moved restlessly; his agitation was so obvious that any man, seeing him, might see it, too.

It was far too early to hope to see Ygerne. After a brief hesitation Drennen returned thought-

fully to his dugout. His door open, his pipe lighted only to die and grow cold, forgotten, he waited. Now and then when a man passed as infrequently happened, Drennen looked up quickly. He frowned each time as the man went on.

A little after nine o'clock a man did stop at his door, carrying a note in his hand. Drennen's thoughts went swiftly to Ygerne, and a quickened beating of his heart sent the blood throbbing through him. But the note was from Sothern and said briefly:

"I have gone on to Lebarge. You were not mistaken. But it is nobody's business but yours and mine. I shall expect you to come on as soon as you are able to make the trip."

The man who had brought the message had gone on up the street. Drennen sat and stared out through his door, across the river, his face set and inscrutable. The eager light in his eyes was not without its anguish. Suddenly he stood up, his gaunt form straight and rigid, his shoulders squared, his jaw thrust out, his fist clenched.

"By Heaven!" he cried aloud, as though he were going to voice the purpose gripping him. Then he broke off, an odd smile upon his lips. And the smile told nothing.

CHAPTER XV

THE TALE OF LE BEAU DIABLE

HIS meeting with Ygerne two hours before noon cast out from his mind all thoughts which did not have to do with her. There was a new glory about her this morning, crowning her like an aureole. Partly was this due to a greater care in her dress and the arranging of her copper-brown hair; partly to the emotions which at sight of him charged through her. She was going down to her breakfast at Joe's when he saw her. He crossed the street to her, his face brightening like a boy's. As he moved along at her side, having had only a fleeting, tantalising glimpse of the grey of her eyes from under the wide brim of her hat, he whispered:

"Do you love me, Ygerne?"

There were men on the street who, though they might not hear the words, could not misread the look. She flushed a little, sent another flashing sidelong glance at him, making him no other answer than that. He asked none other. He accompanied her to Joe's and where they had dined the other evening in the privacy of the half

shut-off room, they breakfasted now. Drennen ordered another cup of coffee for himself and forgot to drink it as he had forgotten the first.

Ygerne, on the other hand, ate her meal with composure. When he sought in a lover's undertone to refer to last night she remarked evasively upon the weather. When he said, over and over, "And you do love me, Ygerne?" she turned her eyes anywhere but upon his and refused to hear. And he laughed a new laugh, so different from that of yesterday, and worshipped man fashion and man fashion yearned to have her in his arms. When at last she had paid her own score, so insistent upon it that Drennen gave over amusedly, they went out together.

"We're going down the river," he told her quite positively. "I want you to sit upon a certain old log I know while I talk to you."

For a little he thought that she would refuse. Then, a hotter flush in her cheeks, she turned with him, passing down the river bank. They drew abreast of his dugout, Ygerne glancing swiftly in at the open door. They had grown silent, even Drennen finding little to say as they moved on. But at length they came to the log, having passed around many green willowed kinks in the Little MacLeod. The girl, sitting, either consciously or through chance, took the attitude in which

Drennen had come upon her with the dual fever in his blood.

Thus Drennen's idyl began. Ygerne, staring straight out before her with wide, unseeing eyes, spoke swiftly, her voice a low monotone that fitted in well with the musing eyes. She loved him; she told him so in a strangely quiet tone and Drennen, wishing to believe, believed and thrilled under her words like the strings of an instrument under a sweeping hand. She told him that while he had been unsleeping last night neither had she slept.

"I didn't know that love came this way," she said. "It was easy to find interest in you; you were wrapped in it like a cloak. Then I think I came to hate you, just as you said that you hated me . . ."

"I was mad, Ygerne!" he broke in contritely.

"Or are we mad now?" she laughed, a vague hint of trouble on her lips. "You say we don't know much of each other. It is worse than just that. What little I know of you is not pretty knowledge. What little I have told you of myself, what you have seen of my companions here, what you have guessed, is hardly the sort of thing to make you choose me, is it? You called me adventuress more than once. Are you sure now that I am not what you named me?"

"I am sure," he answered steadily, his faith in his idol strong upon him. "You are a sweet woman and a true, Ygerne. And if you weren't . . . why, just so you loved me I should not care!"

So they passed from matters vital to mere lovers' talk that was none the less vital to them. Drennen, having long lived a starving existence, his soul pent up within his own self, opened his heart to her and poured out the thoughts which not even to himself had he hitherto acknowledged. He told of his old life in the cities; of the shame and disgrace that had driven him an alien into a sterner land where the names of men meant less than the might and cunning of their right hands; of his restless life leading him up and down upon a trail of flint; of disappointment and disillusion encountered on every hand until all of the old hopes and kindly thoughts were stripped from him; of the evil days which had turned sour within him the milk of human kindness.

Two things alone he would not talk of. He laughed at her, a ringing, boyish laugh when she mentioned them, one after the other. The first was what lay back in her own life, the thing which had driven her here.

"Don't you want me to tell you of that?" she had asked, looking at him swiftly.

"No," he had answered. "Not now. When

we are married, Ygerne, then if you want to tell me I want to hear."

His faith in her was perfect, that was all. He wanted her to know that it was and took this method of telling her.

The other matter was his gold.

"You haven't told me of your discovery," she reminded him, again after a brief, keen scrutiny. "Aren't you going to tell me . . . David?"

It was the first time she had called him David, and the foolish joy at the little incident drove him to take her again to his arms. But with a steady purpose he refused to tell her. He had his reason and to give the reason would thwart his purpose. He meant to go to Lebarge and attend to the routine work there in connection with a new claim. That matter settled, and another, he would return swiftly to MacLeod's Settlement. He would seek Ygerne and they two would slip away together. He would take her with him so that her eyes might be the first to see with him the golden gash in the breast of earth. He would tell her: "It is yours, Ygerne."

So he just said lightly:

"Wait a little, Ygerne. Wait until I come back from Lebarge. I'll be gone a week at most. And then . . . and then, Ygerne . . ."

He had been holding her a little away from him so that he could look into her eyes, his soul

drinking deep of the wine of them. Now he broke off sharply, a swift frown driving for the instant the radiance of his joy from his face. He had forgotten that he and Ygerne Bellaire were not in truth the only two created beings upon the bosom of earth. And now, from around a bend in the river came a low voice singing, Garcia coming into view, Garcia's eternal song upon his lips:

"The perfume of roses, of little red roses;
(Thou art a rose, oh, so sweet, *corazón!*)

Garcia's eyes, a little glint of slumbrous fire in their midnight depths, were upon the man and the girl. He paused a moment, stared, bowed deeply with the old dramatic sweep of his hat. A hot spurt of rage flared across Drennen's brain; this was no accidental meeting. Garcia had seen them leave the Settlement and had followed. Then the burning wrath changed quickly to hard, cold, watchful anger. Through a mere whim of the little gods of chance he had seen another face in the thicket of young elms not twenty paces from Ygerne's log, a face with hard, malevolent eyes, peaked at the bottom with a coppery Vandyck beard. If Ramon Garcia had seen, certainly Sefton had both seen and heard.

When Drennen's long strides had carried him to the thicket there was only the down trodden grass to show him where Sefton had stood for

perhaps ten minutes. When he had come back to Ygerne Ramon Garcia had ended his stare, had turned with his shoulders lifting, and twirling his mustaches had gone back toward the Settlement.

"Ygerne," cried Drennen harshly, "why do you travel with men like that Sefton and Lemarc?"

Her voice was cool, her eyes were cool, as she answered him.

"Marc Lemarc is my cousin. Captain Sefton is his friend. Is that reason enough?"

"No. What have the three of you in common?"

She caught up one knee between her clasped hands, once more seated, and looked up at him curiously. For a moment she seemed to hesitate; then she spoke quietly, her eyes always intent upon his.

"So, if you don't want to know what drove me from New Orleans you do want to know what brought me here? I think that perhaps you could guess if you had heard as much as other men know about my grandfather, Bellaire *le Beau Diable,* as men called him. It is the quest of gold, his gold, which has brought me, and with me Marc and Captain Sefton."

Drennen frowned, shaking his head slowly.

"You won't need to seek such things now, Ygerne," he said with quiet conviction in his tone.

"Surely you know the type of men these two are? Will you cut loose from them, dear?"

The fine lines of her dark eyebrows curved questioningly.

"Because you have found gold, much gold," she returned, "must I come to you penniless, like a beggar?"

Before he could answer she spoke again, flushed with that quick temper which was a part of her.

"They would be glad enough, both of them, if I drew out now! But I won't do it! It is mine, all mine, and I am going to find it! They shall have their shares, as I promised them: ten per cent each. And I, Sir Midas, will not be suspected then of falling in love with you as I am doing because you are rich and I have nothing!"

"Then," said Drennen, "if you are not to be turned aside can I help? Will you tell me about it, Ygerne?"

"Yes and yes," she answered eagerly. "I'll tell you and you can help. Here is the story: When Napoleon was overthrown my grandfather, Paul Bellaire, was a boy of eighteen. But already Napoleon's eye had found him and he was Captain Bellaire. That title suited him better than his inherited one of Count. Already men called him *le Beau Diable*. Then Napoleon went down before Wellington and Paul Bellaire had

to shift for himself under difficult circumstances. But he didn't flee from France as did so many. He twirled his young mustaches and went to Paris.

"Louis, *le Desiré,* had at length got his desire and was King Louis XVIII. Now that the lion was in his cage Louis roared. The young Captain Bellaire, going everywhere that entertaining society was to be found, managed to keep out of Louis's hands. One night, while he was being sought in one end of the kingdom, he danced *en masque* in the palace of the king. The most celebrated beauty of the court was the Lady Louise de Neville. Perhaps a little because she was the beauty she was, perhaps more because she was the king's ward, Paul Bellaire paid her his court.

"The king had a husband for her but the Lady Louise had found one more to her liking. Knowing what royal displeasure might mean, and being, despite her hot heart, a cool-headed sort of person, she took precautions to put all of her estates into gold and jewels which one could carry readily in case of flight. Then she slipped away from the court and rode with her lover to the south.

"That was in the year 1820. Bellaire, though penniless after the disaster of 1815, had managed in the five years to have accumulated much. He was a born gambler and the fates turned the dice

for him so that men said that he was in truth the Devil and the son of the Devil. Like the Lady Louise he had his property converted into such form that a man might carry it in his hands. It became known publicly after the flight that the Némours diamonds and the pearls of the old prince de Chartres had found their way into Bellaire's hands across a table with a green top.

"When the honeymoon was six hours old the wrath of the testy king found them. Paul Bellaire put the Lady Louise out of a side door and upon her horse; then he unlocked the front door and bowed to his callers. They were five men and those of them whom he did not merely cripple he killed. All of France rang with it."

The girl was breathing deeply as though agitated by her own tale, her eyes having the look of one who stares at ghost figures through the dim years. In her voice there was the ringing note of pride, pride of blood, of consanguinity with such a man as her fancy pictured Paul Bellaire to have been.

"He was hurt, badly hurt," she went on. "But he found another horse and left the village, following the Lady Louise to the coast and carrying with him both her moneys and his. A ship brought them to America and they made a home in New Orleans. There they sought and found exiles of their own station, making about them a

circle as brilliant as Louis's court. And here Bellaire prospered until after my father was born. Then there came other trouble, a game in Paul Bellaire's own home over which there were hot dispute and pistol shots. And once more, because he had killed a man who was not without fame, wealth and a wide reaching influence, Paul Bellaire became an exile.

"After that night the Countess Louise saw my grandfather only four times. An exile from two countries, two prices upon his head, he played daily with death. Driven from France he had come to America; now driven from America he went back to France. Louis was dead; a new government held sway; and yet he was not forgotten there. Once, even the authorities got their hands upon him. But again he slipped away, and again he came to New Orleans. He spent one night in his own home with the Countess Louise and their little son; then word of his return leaked out and once more he was a fugitive.

"In spite of all this he lived to be a man of seventy. In 1850, drawn with the tide of adventurers surging to California, he took ship to Panama, crossed the isthmus, and at last came to the Golden Gate. He lived in California for seven years, added to his wealth, and went back for the second time to New Orleans. Again he made the long trip to the West, but this time he

fared further and came on into the Dominion of Canada. He was wealthy, more wealthy than most men suspected then. He brought servants with him and plunging into the wilds devoted his time to the lure of exploration and the sport of hunting big game. A third trip to New Orleans and he confided in his countess that he had found a home for both of them and their son in their old age; he would make of himself a power in a new world; his son should some day be a man for the world to reckon with.

"Coming back to Canada he brought with him the bulk of his own and the Countess Louise's wealth, converting landed property into coined gold and jewels. In 1868 he came back to New Orleans, a hale, stalwart old man, who thought to have a score of years still before him. But the law had never forgotten him and this time found him. In his own home, fighting as the young Captain Bellaire in Napoleon's cavalry had fought, he went down to an assassin's bullet."

There were tears in her eyes, tears of anger as she thought of the old man dying with his wife weeping over him and his son going sick at the sight of the spurting blood. Drennen, watching her, marvelled at the girl. He remembered her words of the other day: "We of the blood of Paul Bellaire are not shop girls!"

In a moment she went on swiftly, the eyes

turned upon Drennen very bright, a flush of excitement in her cheeks.

"My grandmother died soon after Paul Bellaire. They had just the one child, my father. He was no coward; no man ever dared say that of him; but he seemed to have none of the adventuresome blood of his parents. And yet that blood has come down to me! My father inherited the New Orleans home and a position of influence. He became a merchant and prospered. When he married my mother he was a man of considerable property. It was only when both my father and mother were dead that I came to know the story which I have told you. In one breath I learned this and that during the last years of his life my father's means had been dissipated through expensive, even luxurious, living, and a series of unwise speculations. But one heritage did come down to me . . . the memorandum book of my grandfather, Paul Bellaire! And it is because of that that I am here!"

"Lemarc and Sefton?" prompted Drennen.

"Marc learned the story with me. We looked over the papers together. There was a rude cryptic sort of map; I have it. It meant nothing without a key. We searched everywhere for that key. Marc pretending to aid me, had it all of the time in his hand. When he had had time to carry it away and place it where I could not find it he

came back and told me that he had it. Without it the map is useless. So I compromised with Marc, since there was no other way, and he came with me. And Captain Sefton?" She frowned and her voice was hard as she concluded: "Marc has, I think, all of the vices of our blood without its virtues. Through gambling debts and other obligations he was in a bad way. Captain Sefton has him pretty well at his mercy. So, just as I let Marc in, Marc was forced to allow Sefton to become the third member of our party."

A wild enough tale, certainly, and yet Drennen doubted no word of it. Wilder things have been true. And, perhaps, no words issuing from that red mouth of Ygerne's would have failed to ring true in her lover's ears.

"You said that I could help?"

"Yes." Again there was that glint of eagerness in her eyes; no doubt the old Bellaire fortune of minted gold and jewels in their rich settings shone in dazzling fashion before her stimulated fancy. "We have found the spot; it is in a cañon not twenty miles from here. But, at some time during the last ten winters, there have been heavy landslides. The whole side of a mountain has slipped down, covering the place where, on the map, there is the little cross which spells treasure. It will take money, much money, for the excavation. And Marc and Captain Sefton and I have

no money. We may dig for months, but at last . . ."

"I'll finance it," said Drennen steadily. "If you will allow me, Ygerne? I'd do so much more than just that for you! I am afraid it will have to wait until I can have sold my claim. Then you can have what you want, five thousand, ten thousand . . ."

She had sprung to her feet, her arms flung out about his neck.

"I believe you do love me, David," she said triumphantly.

Before Drennen left her it was arranged that Lemarc was to come with him to Lebarge, that Drennen was to raise the money as soon as he could, that it was to be placed in Lemarc's hands so that the work could begin. And the next morning David Drennen, bearing a heart which sang in his bosom, left the Settlement for Lebarge.

"In a week at most I'll be back, Ygerne," he had whispered to her. "On the seventh day, in the morning early, will you meet me here, Ygerne?"

And Ygerne promised.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LOST GOLDEN GIRL PAYS AN OLD DEBT

DRENNEN, presenting himself early upon the second morning in the offices of the Northwestern Mining Company, found that he was expected. A clerk, arranging papers of the day's work upon his desk, came forward quickly, a look of interest in his eyes.

"Mr. Drennen?" he asked.

"Yes."

"This way, sir. You come early but they are looking for you."

Drennen followed him through a second office, unoccupied, and to a glazed door upon which was the inscription, "Local Manager." The sound of voices coming through the door fell off abruptly at the clerk's discreet knock.

Drennen entered and the clerk, closing the door, went back to his own office. Fronting Drennen, at his flat-topped desk, sat old Marshall Sothern, the muscles of his face tense, his eyes grim with the purpose in them. A second man, small, square, strong-faced, a little reckless-eyed,

sat close to Sothern. The third man of the group, standing fronting the two, was a young looking fellow, tall and with the carriage of a soldier, wearing the uniform of an officer of the mounted police.

Sothern rose, putting out his hand across the table.

"Good morning, Mr. Drennen," he said evenly. "I am glad that you have come so soon. This is Mr. McCall," nodding toward the strong-faced, middle-aged man with the young eyes. "You've heard of him, no doubt? Our chief over the Western Division. And this is Lieutenant Max of the Northwest Mounted, one of 'my boys.' Be seated, Mr. Drennen. And if you will pardon us a second?"

He turned toward Lieutenant Max. Drennen, having gripped Sothern's hand, having bestowed upon him a sharp look which seemed to seek to pierce through the hard shell which is the outer man and into the soul of him where the real self is hidden, acknowledged the two introductions and sat down.

"I think that that is all, isn't it, Lieutenant?" Sothern was saying as he picked up the thread of conversation which Drennen's entrance had snapped. "Those are the people you want?"

"Yes." Max's words, though very quiet and low toned, had in them something of the pre-

cision and finality of pistol shots. "They'll not get away this time, Mr. Sothern."

"*He* mustn't get away. But remember, Lieutenant, that the time is not ripe yet. I positively can do nothing to help your case until . . . until I am ready!"

"I'll wait."

Max lifted his hand in a sort of salute, turned and went out. Drennen, bringing his eyes back from the departing figure, found that both Marshall Sothern and McCall were studying him intently.

"Mr. Drennen," said Sothern, "I presume you are here to talk business. You have a mine you want us to look at?"

"I am here for two purposes," answered Drennen steadily, his eyes hard upon the older man's. "That is one of them."

"The other can wait. Mr. McCall and myself are at your disposal. From the specimens I have seen I am inclined to think that you have not discovered a new mine at all, but have stumbled on to the old Lost Golden Girl. If so, you are to be congratulated . . . and so are we."

Drennen nodded, waiting for Sothern to go on.

"You made a certain offer to Charlie Madden," continued Sothern. "Was that your bona fide proposition, Mr. Drennen? Or were you merely sparring for time and putting out a bluff?"

"I meant business," returned Drennen. "I know that the property is worth considerably more than I am asking. But I have a use for just that sum."

"A hundred thousand dollars, cash, I believe? And a ten per cent royalty?" put in McCall quietly.

"Exactly." Again Drennen nodded.

"You want me to look it over with you, Sothern?" demanded McCall. "It isn't necessary, you know. Not now."

"I want you to do me the favour, McCall," answered Sothern. "Mr. Drennen, yesterday the only man in the West empowered to do business for the Northwestern upon such a scale as this was Mr. McCall. But things have happened in the East. Our chief, Bruce Elwood, is dead. Mr. McCall goes to-morrow to Montreal, stepping into Mr. Elwood's place. I move on and up into Mr. McCall's."

He paused, his face inscrutable under its dark frown. Suddenly he swung about upon McCall.

"Andy," he said sharply, "you're going to do more than just look at Mr. Drennen's find with us. You're going to act upon his offer as you see fit. As a favour to me, Andy."

Both Drennen and McCall looked at him curiously. Sothern's stern face told nothing.

"As a favour to me, Andy," he repeated. "You bring me word of my promotion. Pigeonhole it until after this deal is made or rejected."

McCall, his hesitation brief, swung about upon Drennen.

"Where is this mine of yours?" he demanded curtly. "How long will it take us to get to it?"

"It's less than forty miles from Lebarge," returned Drennen. "And we can get there in five hours, if we keep on moving."

"You have filed your title, of course?"

"Yes."

"Come ahead then." McCall was upon his feet, his hat on his head and his cigar lighted all in little more than an instant.

In ten minutes the party was formed and had clattered out of Lebarge, back along the MacLeod trail. There were five men in the little group, Drennen, Sothern, McCall and two mining experts in the pay of the Northwestern. As they swept out of Lebarge, rounding into the cañon where the trail twisted ahead of them, Drennen saw two men looking after them. One was Marc Lemarc who had accompanied him to Lebarge; the other Lieutenant Max.

Once in the trail the five men strung out in a line, Drennen in the lead. It was easy to see his impatience in the hot pace he set for them, and they thought that it was no less easy to understand

it. But for once they followed a man who thought less of his gold mine than of a girl.

Drennen's gold mine itself plays no part in this story. He was never to see it again after this day, although it was to pour many thousands of dollars into his pockets from a distance. In the *West Canadian Mining and Milling News,* date of *August 9, 1912,* appears a column-and-a-half article upon the subject, readily accessible to any who are not already familiar with the matter which excited so wide an interest at the time and for many months afterwards. The article is authoritative to the last detail. It explains how the Golden Girl became a lost mine in 1799, and how it happened that while David Drennen had discovered it in 1912 it had been hidden to other eyes than his. A series of earthquakes of which we have record, occurring at the beginning of the nineteenth century, bringing about heavy snow-slides and landslides, had thrown the course of one of the tributaries of the Little MacLeod from its bed into a new channel where a sudden depression had sunk the golden vein of the lost mine.

Here, just before the winter of 1911-12 shut down, David Drennen had found a nugget which he had concealed, saying nothing about it. The snows came and he went back to MacLeod's Settlement to wait for the coming of springtime and

passable trails. The first man to pack out of the Settlement prospecting, he had come to the spot which last year he had marked under the cliffs known locally as Hell's Lace. The trail had been rotten underfoot and he had slipped and fallen into one of the black pools. Clambering out he had found the thing he sought; where the trail had broken away was gold, much gold. In the bed of the stream itself, nicely hidden for a hundred years by the cold, black water, swept into deep pools, jammed into sunken crevices, was the old lost gold of the Golden Girl.

The *West Canadian Mining and Milling News* of the same date goes on to mention that the last official act of Mr. Andrew McCall as Local Agent for the Northwestern, had been the purchasing of his claim from David Drennen at the latter's figure, namely one hundred thousand dollars in cash, and an agreement of a royalty upon the mine's output.

Despite Drennen's impatience to be riding trail again it was a week before the deal was consummated. Half a mile above his claim it was possible for the engineers to throw the stream again into its old bed, a score of men and three days' work accomplishing the conditions which had obtained before the period of seismic disturbance. Then followed days of keen expert investigation. Even when they were sure these men who know as

most men do not the value of caution when they are allowed to take time for caution, postponed their final verdict. But at last the thing was done and McCall, taking his train for the East, left Lebarge with a conscious glow of satisfaction over the last work done as superintendent of the Western Division.

Marshall Sothern, returning from the railroad station, found Drennen waiting for him in his private office.

"Well, Mr. Drennen," he said quietly, going about the table and to his chair, "how does it feel to be worth a cool hundred thousand?"

"It feels," cried the younger man sharply, his voice ringing with a hint of excitement which had been oddly lacking in him throughout the whole transaction, "like power! Like a power I've been hungering for for ten years! May I have your stenographer for a few moments, sir?"

Sothern touched the buzzer and the clerk came in from the outer office.

"Take Mr. Drennen's dictation," said Sothern. "I'll go into the other room. . . ."

Drennen lifted his hand.

"It's nothing private, sir," he said. "I'd rather you stayed. I'd like a word with you afterwards."

The clerk took pencil and notebook. And

Drennen, his eyes never leaving Sothern's face, dictated:

"Harley W. Judson, Esq., President Eastern Mines, Inc.,
New York.

DEAR SIR:—In compliance with the last request of my father, John Harper Drennen, before his departure for Europe in 1901, I am forwarding draft on the Merchants' & Citizens' National Bank of New York for $40,000. John Harper Drennen's original indebtedness to your company was, you will remember, $75,000. Of this amount some $50,000 was paid from the sales of such properties belonging to him at that time. The remaining $25,000 at an interest of 6% for the ten years during which the obligation has continued, amounts to the $40,000 which I enclose.

Respectfully,"

"That is all, Mr. Drennen?" asked the clerk.

"That is all," answered Drennen. The clerk went out. Drennen turned toward the man at the desk whose stern set face had gone strangely white.

"The absconding John Harper Drennen made such a request of you?" Marshall Sothern said calmly, though the effort for control was evident.

"No. It's just a little lie told for my father . . . the only thing I have ever done for him!"

Drennen came suddenly about the table, both of his strong hands out.

"When a man is very young he judges sweepingly, he condemns bitterly. Now . . . why, now I don't give a damn what you've done or why!" His voice went hoarse, his hands shook and into the hard eyes of David Drennen, eyes grown unbelievably soft now, the tears stood. "If only you hadn't shut me out that way . . . God! I've missed you, Dad!"

The old man made no answer as his hand grew like rock about his son's. A smile ineffably sweet touched his lips and shone in his eyes. The years had been hard, merciless years to him as they had been to David Drennen. But for a moment the past was forgotten, this brief fragment of time standing supreme in the two lives. At last, in the silence, there fell upon them that little awkwardness which comes to such men when for a second they have let their souls stand naked in their eyes. Almost at the same instant each man sought his pipe, filling it with restless fingers.

"My boy," said the man whose name had been Marshall Sothern through so many weary years that it was now more his name than any other, "there is the tale to tell . . . sometime. I can't do it now. One of these days . . . this has been the only dream I've dreamed since I saw you last, in Manhattan, David . . . you and I are going to pack off into the mountains. We're going alone, David, and we're going far; so far that the

smoke of our little camp fire will be for our eyes and nostrils alone. Then I can tell you my story. And . . . David . . ."

"Yes, Dad?"

"That forty thousand . . . You are a gentleman, David! That was like you. I . . . I thank you, my boy!"

Drennen's face, through a rush of emotions, reddened. Reddened for an unreasoning, inexplicable shame no less than for a proud sort of joy that at last he had been able to do some small thing for John Harper Drennen, his old hero.

Again there fell a silence, a little awkward. The two men, with so much to say to each other, found a thousand thoughts stopping the rush of words to be spoken. Drennen realised what his father had had in mind, or rather in that keenly sensitive, intuitive thing which is not mind but soul, when he had spoken of the two of them taking together a trail which must lead them for many days into the solitudes before they could talk to each other of the matters which counted. Something not quite shyness but akin to it was upon them both; it was a relief when the telephone of Sothern's desk rang.

It was Marc Lemarc asking for Drennen. He had hired men, bought tools and dynamite, ordered machinery from the nearest city where machinery was to be had, had spoken to a compe-

tent engineer about taking charge of the work to be done. He was quite ready to return to MacLeod's Settlement.

"It's all right, Lemarc," answered Drennen. "I have deposited the money in your name in the Lebarge Bank. You can draw out whatever you please and when you please. No, you needn't wait for me; I'll overtake you, I have no doubt. Oh, that's all right!"

Before Drennen had finished there came the second interruption. The clerk came to announce the arrival of Israel Weyeth, who, upon Sothern's promotion, was to fill the vacant position of Local Manager.

"Mr. Sothern," said Drennen while the clerk was still in the room, "I shall remember your promise of a hunting trip with me. I am going up to MacLeod's Settlement immediately. I trust to see you again very soon."

"Mr. Drennen," answered the old man quietly, "I am honoured in your friendship. You have done me a kindness beyond measure but not beyond my appreciation."

They shook hands gravely, their eyes seeking to disguise the yearning which stood in each soul. Then Drennen went out.

"There, sir," cried Sothern, and the clerk marvelled at the note in his voice which sounded so like pride of ownership, "there goes a man from

whom the world shall hear one of these days. His feet are at last in the right path."

The clerk, going to usher in Israel Weyeth, did not hear the last low words:

"For which, thank God . . . and Ygerne Bellaire!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE PASSION OF ERNESTINE DUMONT

A MAN'S life may pass for him like a slow winding stream through open meadows in gentle valley lands, its waters clear and untroubled by rapids, falls and eddies. Even a man with such a life has his vital story. But it is pastoral, idyllic, like a quiet painting done in a soft monochrome. Or a man's life may shake him with a series of shocks which, to the soul, are cataclysmic. And then the man, be his strength what it may, since he is human and it is not infinite, is caught like a dry leaf in the maelstrom of life about him and within him, and is sucked down into depths where the light does not penetrate or is flung from the mad current into a quiet cove where he may rest with the din of the angry waters in his ears.

Drennen had been over the falls; he now rested in such a cove. He had battled furiously with fury itself; now he was soothingly touched by the tide of gentler emotions. He did not think; rather he dreamed. He had looked for the light the other day and had found it everywhere. Now,

most of all did it seem to be within himself. We see the outside world as we carry it within us; the eyes, rather mirrors than telescopes, reflect what is intimate rather than that which lies beyond.

To-day, riding back along the trail, Drennen saw how golden were the fresh tips of the firs; how each young tree was crowned with a star; how each budding pine lifted skyward what resembled a little cluster of wax candles. Stars and candles, celestial light and light man-kindled, glory of God and glory of man.

With a rebound, it seemed, the young soul of the David Drennen of twenty had again entered his breast. There had been a time when he had loved life, the world, the men about him; when he had looked pleasantly into the faces of friends and strangers; when he had been ready to form a new tie of comradeship and had no thought of hatred; when he had credited other men with kindly feelings and honest hearts. That time had come again.

Somewhere ahead of him Marc Lemarc was riding. Drennen did not think unkindly of him. He realised that the hatred he had felt a few days ago had been born of delirium and madness and jealousy. Ygerne sought to retrieve the long lost Bellaire fortune; Lemarc's interests jumped with hers in the matter. One had the map, the other the key; they must work together. Le-

marc was riding with the jingle of Drennen's money in his pocket and Drennen was glad to think of it. He was helping Ygerne, he was not sorry to help Lemarc at the same time. This morning he had had one hundred thousand dollars! He smiled, then laughed aloud. One hundred thousand dollars! Now he had fifty thousand; already he had opened his hand and poured out fifty thousand dollars! That was the old Drennen, the headlong, generous Drennen, the Drennen who took more delight in giving than in spending, and no delight in selfishness. He had done all that he could do to help wipe the stain from his father's name; he had lifted a burden from his father's shoulders. While he could not understand everything he knew that. And he had staked Lemarc.

Another man would have called for Lemarc's bills, have gone over them, have moved slowly and with caution. That would not have been Drennen. He gave forty thousand for his father's name; he placed ten thousand where Ygerne could use it through Lemarc. He had fifty thousand left and he felt that he had not done enough, that he had kept back too much. True, the thought had flickered through his brain: "And suppose that Lemarc *should* take the cash and let the credit go? Suppose that he should be contented with the ten thousand dollar bird in his

hand and never mind the hypothetical Bellaire treasure bird in the bush?" Well, then, it would be worth it to Ygerne; just for her to know what sort Lemarc was. Drennen had more money than he needed; he had an assured income from the newly rediscovered Golden Girl; there were still other mines in the world for the man who could find them; and he had merely done for Ygerne Bellaire the first thing she had asked of him. In Drennen's eyes, in this intoxicated mood, it seemed a very little thing.

He had bought a horse in Lebarge, the finest animal to be had in the week's search. He had supplied himself with new clothes, feeling in himself, reborn, the desire for the old garb of a gentleman. He had telegraphed two hundred miles for a great box of chocolates for Ygerne; he had sent a message twice that distance for his first bejewelled present for her. Nothing in Lebarge was to be considered; the golden bauble which came in answer to his message, a delicate necklace pendant glorious with pearls, cost him three hundred dollars and contented him.

He was happy. He opened his mind to the joy of life calling to him; he closed his thoughts to all that was not bright. Ygerne was waiting for him; John Harper Drennen was not dead, but alive and near at hand. The man who had judged hard and bitterly before, now suspended

judgment. It was not his place to condemn his fellow man; certainly he was not to sit in trial on his own father and the woman who would one day be his wife! The lone wolf had come back to the pack. He wanted companionship, friendship, love.

It had been close to eleven o'clock when he rode out of Lebarge. He counted upon his horse's strength and a moonlit night to bring him back to the Settlement in time for a dawn tryst down the river at a certain fallen log. He pushed on steadily until four o'clock in the afternoon; then he stopped, resting his horse and himself, tarrying for a little food and tobacco. At five o'clock he again swung into the saddle and pushed on.

He knew that Lemarc was ahead of him. Here, where tracks were few, were those of Lemarc's horse. Drennen had not loitered and he knew that Lemarc was riding hard. Well, Lemarc, too, rode with gold in his pockets and in his heart further hope of gold. If he were running way with the money Drennen had advanced he was running the wrong way. Drennen did not break off in the little song upon his lips at the thought. . . . More than once that day he found himself humming snatches of Ramon Garcia's refrain.

"*Dios!* It is sweet to be young and to love!"

Fragrant dusk crept down about him, warm, sweet-scented night floated out from the dusk, a few stars shone, the moon passed up above the ridge at his right and made of the Little MacLeod's racing water alternate lustrous ebony and glistening silver, a liquid mosaic. Drennen fell silent, a deep content upon him.

Scarcely two miles from MacLeod's Settlement, and an episode offered itself which in the end seemed to have no deeper purpose than to show to the man himself how wonderful was the change wrought within him. He had crested a gentle rise, had had for a moment the glint of a light in his eyes and had wondered at it idly, knowing that not yet could he see the Settlement and that this was no hour, long after midnight, for folks to be abroad there. Then, dropping down into the copse which made black the hollow, he remembered the old, ruined cabin which had stood here so long tenantless and rotting, realising that the light he had seen came from it. Lemarc? That was his first thought as again he caught the uncertain flicker through the low branches. The man might have been thrown in the darkness, his horse could easily have caught a sprain from the uneven trail, slippery and treacherous.

"Poor devil," reflected Drennen. "To get laid up this near the end of his ride."

His trail led close to the tumbled down cabin. Once in the little clearing he made out quickly that a fire was burning fitfully upon the old rock hearth. He could see its flames and smoke clearly through the wall itself which was no longer a wall but the debris of rotted logs with here and there a timber still sound and hanging insecurely. He saw no one. Coming closer, still making out no human form in the circle of light or in the gloom about it, he heard a low moaning, as fitful as the uncertain firelight. And then, as he drew his horse to a standstill, he made out upon the floor near the fire and in the shadow of one of the hanging timbers, an indistinct form. For an instant the low moaning was quieted; then again it came to his ears, seeming to speak of suffering unutterable.

Dismounted, Drennen came swiftly through the yawning door to stand at the side of the prone figure. A great, unreasonable and still a natural fear sprang up in his heart; he went down upon his knees with a half sob gripping at his throat. It was a woman, her body twisting before him, and he was afraid that it was Ygerne and that she was dying. Her face was hidden, an arm was flung up, her loosened hair fell wildly about her temples and cheeks. Again the moaning ceased; the woman turned so that her cheek lay upon the loose dirt of the broken floor, her eyes wide

upon him. A sigh inflated his chest and fell away like a whisper of thanks. The woman was not Ygerne, thank God!

"Go away!" She panted the words at him, venom in her glance. Then abruptly she turned her face from him.

A swift revulsion of feeling swept through him. Just now he had thanked God that this was not Ygerne; just now he had been so glad in his relief that there was no room for pity in his gladness. Now, as involuntarily his old joy surged back upon him, he felt a quick sting of shame. He had no right to be so utterly happy when there was suffering and sorrow such as this. As he had not yet fully understood, now did he grasp in a second that change which had come about within himself. There was tenderness in his eyes, there were pity and sympathy as he stooped still lower.

"Ernestine," he said softly. "What is it, Ernestine? I want to help you if I can. What is the matter, Ernestine?"

Her body, stilled while he spoke, writhed again passionately.

"Go away!" she panted out at him as she had done before, save that now she did not turn her face to look at him. "Of all men, Dave Drennen, I hate you most. Good God, how I hate you! Go away!"

There came a sob into her voice, a shudder shaking the prone body. Drennen, knowing little of the ways of women, wanting only to help her, uncertain and hesitant, knelt motionless, staring at her with troubled eyes. Over and over the questions pricked his brain: "What was she doing out here alone at this time of night? What had happened to her?"

He thought for a moment of springing to his feet, of hastening down the two miles of trail to the Settlement, of rushing aid to the stricken woman. Then another thought: "She may die while I am gone! It will take an hour to get help to her."

"Ernestine," he said again, gently, laying his hand upon her shaking shoulder. "I know you don't like me. But at times like this that doesn't matter. Tell me what has happened . . . let me help you. I want to help you if I can, Ernestine."

He was sincere in that; he wanted to help her. It didn't matter who it was suffering; he wanted to see no more suffering in his world. He wanted every one to be as happy as he was going to be. There was a new yearning upon him, that yearning which is the true first born of a man's love, a yearning to do some little good in the world that he may have this to think upon and not just the bad which he has done.

She lay very still, making him no answer. He

could not guess if she were suffering from physical injury or from the other hurt which is harder to bear. He could not guess if she were growing calm or if she were losing consciousness. He could only plead with her, his voice softer than Ernestine Dumont had ever heard the voice of David Drennen, begging her to let him do something for her.

With a sudden, swift movement, she turned about, sitting up, her arms about her knees, her head with its loosened hair thrown back. For the first time he saw her face clearly. There was dirt upon it as though she had fallen upon the trail, face down. There was a smear of blood across her mouth. There was a scratch upon her forehead, and a trickle of blood had run down across her soiled brow. He saw that, while she had sobbed, no tears had come to make their glistening furrows through the dust upon her cheeks. He thought that in his time he, too, had known such tearless agony.

"Your help!" She flung the words at him passionately. "I'd die before I'd take your help, Dave Drennen. What do you care for me?"

"I'm sorry for you, Ernestine," he said gently.

She laughed at him bitterly, her body rocking back and forth.

"Why don't you go?" she cried hotly. "Go

on to MacLeod's. Your little fool is waiting for you, I suppose," she sneered at him.

Dropping her head to her upgathered knees, her body rocking stormily, moaning a little, she broke off. Drennen rose to his feet.

"I'll go," he said. "Shall I send some one to you?"

When she didn't answer he turned away from her. He had done all that he could do. And, besides, he thought that the woman's physical injuries were superficial and that her distress was doubtless that of mere violent hysteria.

"Come back!" she called sharply.

He turned and again came to her side, standing over her, his hat in his hand, his face showing only the old pity for her. Once more she had flung up her head. In the eyes staring up at him was a hunger which even David Drennen could not misread.

"Tell me," she said after a little, her voice more quiet than it had been. "Do you love Ygerne Bellaire, Dave?"

"Yes," he answered quietly.

"You fool!" she cried at him. "Why is a man always blind to what another woman can see so plainly? Don't you know what she is?"

"Let's not talk of her, Ernestine," he said a little sharply.

"She's too holy for a woman like me to talk

about, is she? She's a little cat, Dave Drennen! Can't you see that? Don't you know what she is after . . ."

"Ernestine!" he commanded harshly. "If I can help you, let me do it. If I can't, I'll go. In either case we'll not talk of Miss Bellaire."

She looked at him curiously, studying him, seeming for an instant to have grown quiet in mind as in body.

"She doesn't love you," she said calmly. "Not as I love you, Dave. If she did . . . nothing would matter. She's got baby eyes and a baby face . . . and she runs with men like Sefton and Lemarc!"

"I tell you," he cried sternly, "I'll not listen to you talk of her. If I can't help you . . ."

Her eyes shone hard upon his. Then her head dropped again and once more she was moaning as when he had first heard her, moaning and weeping, her body twisting. Again the man was all uncertainty.

"You would do anything for her!" she cried brokenly. "You would do nothing for me."

"I would do anything for you that you would let me and that I could do, Ernestine," he said gently.

"And," she went on, unheeding, "it is because of you that I am like this to-night!"

"Because of me?" wonderingly.

"Yes," with a fierce sob. "Because he knew I loved you. . . . I would not have shot you that night at Père Marquette's if I hadn't loved you! . . . Do you think a woman is made like a man? . . . George has done this! If he laid hands upon her, upon your holy lady I'm not to talk about . . ."

"Tell me about it," he commanded. "Has Kootanie George done this to you?"

"Dave!" Suddenly she had flung up her arms, staring at him strangely. "Do you think I am dying? He hurt me here . . . and here . . . and here." Her hands fluttered about her body, touching her throat, her breast, her side. The hands, lowered a moment were again lifted, stretched upward toward him, her eyes pleading with him. Slowly she was sinking back; he thought that in truth the woman was dying or at the least losing consciousness.

"Can't you help me?" she moaned. "Won't you hold me . . . I am falling. . . ."

Upon his knees he slipped his arms about her. He felt a hard stiffening of the muscles of her body, then a slow relaxing. He was laying her back gently, when she shook her head.

"Hold me up," she whispered, the words faint though her lips were close to his ear. "I'd smother if I lay down. . . ."

So he held her for a long time, fearing for her,

at loss for a thing to do. The flickering firelight showed his face troubled and solicitous, hers half smiling now as though she were content to suffer so long as he held her. Presently she put her head back a little further, her eyes meeting his.

"You are good, Dave," she whispered. "Good to me. I have not been good to you, have I? Would you be a little sorry for me if I died?"

"Don't talk that way, Ernestine," he besought her. "You are not going to die."

She put up one hand and pushed the hair back from his brow. He flinched a little at the intimacy of the touch but she did not seem to notice. She was smiling at him now, all hint of pain gone from her eyes for the moment.

"If you had loved me," she said gently, "we both would have been happy. Now I'll never be happy, Dave, and you'll never be happy. *She* won't make you happy. She'll make a fool of you and then . . ."

Again she grew silent, her lids lowered. Drennen thought that she was sinking into a quiet sleep. He did not stir as the moments slipped by. A stick on the old hearth snapping and falling drew to it Ernestine's eyes. Then they came again to Drennen. While she looked at him she seemed not to be seeing him or thinking of him. She seemed, rather, to be listening for some sound she expected to hear. Again she was very still,

the firelight finding an odd smile upon her face. She had wiped much of the dust away and her pretty face, a little hard at most time, was softened by the half light. After a little she sighed. Then, swiftly, she slipped from Drennen's arms.

"I suppose you think I am a fool," she laughed strangely. "Well, I know that you are, Dave Drennen! Now, go away, will you? Or do I have to crawl away from here to get away from you? My God!" a sudden passion again breaking through the ice of her tone, "I wish I had killed you the other night. Before . . . *she* came!"

No other word did Drennen draw from her. She sat as she had sat a little while ago, her arms flung about her knees, her face hidden in her arms. And so, at last, he left her.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LAW AND A MAN'S DESIRE

DRENNEN slept two hours that night. He awoke rested, refreshed, eager. He did not need sleep. He was Youth's own, tireless, stimulated with the golden elixir.

Ygerne must not be before him at the trysting place; she must not wait for him a short instant. It was his place to be there to welcome her. She would come with the early dawn; he must come earlier than the dawn itself.

When he came to the old fallen log the smile upon his lips, in his eyes, bespoke a deep, sweet tenderness. He had brought with him the two gifts for her. He put the box of candy in the grass, covering it, planning to have her search for it. He felt like a boy; she must join with him in a childplay. The pendant necklace, its pearls as pure and soft as tears, he placed upon the log itself, in a little hollow, covering it with a piece of bark. Then he found her note.

It was very short; he read it at a sweeping glance. His brain caught the words; his mind

refused to grasp their meaning. And yet Ygerne had written clearly:

"*Dear Mr. Drennen:* The greetings of Ygerne, Countess of Bellaire, to the Son of a Thief! Thank you for a new kind of summer flirtation. May your next one be as pleasant. A man of such wonderful generosity deserves great happiness. Good-bye. YGERNE."

Simple enough. And yet the words meant nothing to him. By his foot was a square box of chocolates peeping out at him. He had telegraphed . . . where was it? . . . to Edmontville for them. They were for Ygerne. There on the log, right where she had sat, under the little chip of bark, was her necklace of pearls. She was coming for it in a moment, coming like Aurora's own sweet self through the dawn. He had telegraphed for that, too. It was his first present for her.

The Son of a Thief! The Countess of Bellaire! That meant David Drennen, son of John Harper Drennen; it meant Ygerne, the girl-woman who had come into David Drennen's life before it was too late, who had made of him another man.

He sat down on the log and filled his pipe. The note he let lie, half folded, upon his knee. His eyes went thoughtfully across the thin mist hang-

ing like gauze above the river; then turned expectantly toward the Settlement. She would come in a moment. And the glory of her! The eternal quivering, throbbing glory of the woman a man loves! She would come and he would gather her into his arms. . . . For that the world had been made, for that he had lived until now. . . .

He had lighted his pipe and was puffing at it slowly, each little cloud of smoke coming at the regular interval from its brethren. And he did not know that he was smoking. He was not thinking. For the moment he was scarcely experiencing an emotion. He knew that Marshall Sothern was John Harper Drennen; he knew that the Golden Girl had been sold; he knew that a box of candy and a pearl necklace were waiting for Ygerne; he knew that there was a note upon his knee which purported to be from her. Each of these things was quite clear and separate in his mind; the strange thing about them was that they had in some way lost significance to him.

Presently, with a start, he took his pipe from his lips and ran a hand across his forehead. What was he sitting here like a fool for? Either Ygerne had written that note or she had not. If she had written it she had done so either in jest or seriously. He turned back toward the Settlement. He did not think of the jewelled thing hid-

den under a bit of bark or the cardboard box in its nest in the grass.

He went swiftly. The town was sleeping, would not awake for another hour. His eyes were upon Marquette's house as soon as the rambling building came into view. There were no fires; window shades were drawn, doors closed.

He came to Ygerne's window. It, too, was closed. Here, also, the shade was down. He tapped softly. When there was no answer he tapped again. Then he went to Marquette's door and knocked sharply.

"Nom de nom." It was Père Marquette's voice, sleepy and irritable. The old man was fumbling with the bar or the lock or whatever it was that fastened his door. He seemed an eternity in getting the thing done. Then his towsled head and blinking eyes appeared abruptly.

"Where is Miss Bellaire?" said Drennen quietly. "I want a word with her."

"Mees Bellaire? *Hein?*"

"Yes," answered Drennen a trifle impatiently, though he was holding himself well in hand. "Miss Bellaire. I know it is early, but . . ."

Père Marquette blinked at him curiously with brightening, birdlike eyes. He didn't like Drennen; God knows he had little enough reason to see any good in this gaunt, wolf-like man. There was a dry cackle in the old man's voice as he

spoke again, the door closing slowly so that only half of his face with one bright eye looked out.

"Early? *Mais, non, m'sieu!* It is late! M'am'selle, she is gone *il y a quelques heures,* already! Pouf! Like that, in a hurry."

"Gone?" demanded Drennen. "Where? When?"

"Where? Who knows? When?" He shrugged. "Two, t'ree, four hours, *peutêtre* six."

"Who was with her?"

"Ho," cackled the old man so that Drennen's hands itched to be at the withered throat, "where she go, there are men to follow! Me, when I am yo'ng, before Mamma Jeanne make me happy, I . . ."

"Damn you and your Mamma Jeanne!" cried Drennen. "Tell me about this girl. Who went with her?"

"Not so many," muttered Marquette, "because she go quiet, in the dark. In the day the whole Settlement would follow, *non?* But Marc Lemarc, he go; an' M'sieu Sefton, he go; an' M'sieu Ramon, he go. . . ."

"I'll give you a hundred dollars if you can tell me which way they went!" broke in Drennen crisply. "I'll give you five hundred if you can tell me why?"

"Qui sait?" grumbled Marquette. "They go,

they go in the dark, they go with horses runnin' like hell. M'am'selle sleep; then come Lemarc, fas', to knock on her window. I hear. She dress damn fas', too, or she don't dress at all; in one minute she's outside with Lemarc. I hear Sefton; I hear Ramon Garcia, a little song in his throat. I hear horses. I hear M'am'selle Ygerne laugh like it's fon! Then she wake me an' she pay me; I see Lemarc give her money, gol' money, to pay. Me, I go back to bed an' Mamma Jeanne suspec' it might be I flirt with the M'am'selle by dark!"

He chuckled again and closed the door as Drennen turned abruptly and went back down the street towards his dugout.

Marc Lemarc had robbed him of the ten thousand dollars. He began there, strangely cool-thoughted. That didn't matter. He had half expected it all along. He knew now, clearly, that, more than that, he had half hoped for it. The money meant less than nothing to him; the theft of it, he had thought, would show Ygerne just what sort of man Lemarc was, would separate her from her companions, would draw her even closer to him. But Ygerne, too, had gone with the money and with Lemarc. Marquette had seen him hand her the gold that she might pay her reckoning. Here was a contingency upon which he had not counted.

As soon as Lemarc had returned she had gone. Sefton had gone with them. Ramon Garcia, too. Why Garcia?

A scene he had not forgotten, which now he could never forget, occupied his mind so vividly that he did not see the material things among which he was walking: Ramon Garcia at Ygerne's window, the gift of a few field flowers, the kissing of a white hand.

Men who had known Drennen for years and who would have been surprised at what was in the man's face yesterday, saw nothing new to note in him to-day. He went his own way, he was silent, his face was hard and not to be read. All day he was about the Settlement, in his own dug-out a large part of the time, going to his meals regularly at Joe's. It was rumoured that he had sold his claim; men began to doubt it. He wasn't scattering money as men had always done when they had made a fortune at a turn of the wheel; he wasn't getting drunk which was the customary thing; he wasn't even looking for a game of cards or dice. There was no sign of any new purpose in the man.

And yet the purpose was there, taken swiftly, to be acted upon with a cold leisure. Drennen was not hurrying now. There was no other horse like Major, his recently purchased four-year-old, and Drennen knew it. He had ridden Major hard

yesterday; to-day the brute must rest and be ready for more hard riding.

One thing only did Drennen do which excited mild interest, though the reason for the act was naturally misunderstood. He went to Joe and bought from him two heavy revolvers. Drennen had never been a gun man, had ever relied upon his own hands in time of trouble. But now, Joe figured the matter out, he had money and he meant to guard against a hold-up.

Entire lack of haste was the only thing remarkable about David Drennen to-day and through the days which followed. There was no hesitation, no doubt, no being torn two ways. He had made up his mind what he was going to do. It was settled and not to be reconsidered. But he would not hurry. The very coolness with which his purpose was taken steadied him to a strange deliberateness. He knew that it was folly to expect to come up with Ygerne and the men with her immediately. It would take time; they had fled hastily and they were in a country where pursuit was necessarily slow. Was that not the reason why such people came here? And he told himself grimly that it was an equal folly to desire to come upon them too soon. The punishment he would mete out would be the harder if their flight had seemed crowned with security.

Upon the second day he rode in widening cir-

cles about MacLeod's Settlement. He hardly hoped to pick up a trail here where questing hundreds in search of his gold had cut the soft spring ground into a jumble of indecipherable tracks. But, beginning his own quest with a painstaking thoroughness which omitted no chance however remote, he spent the day in seeking.

At night he came again into camp. He saw to the Major's wants before his own. He ate his meal at Joe's and having passed no word with any man came back to his dugout.

The supreme blow which his destiny could give him had been smitten relentlessly. He had received it like the slave who has been beaten so many times that he no longer cries out or strikes back prematurely. Like the tortured bond-man who makes no useless protest but hides in his bosom the knife which one day he will plunge into his master's throat, Drennen merely bided his time.

He saw no good in a world which had had no good to offer him. He no longer looked for the light. New shoots of faith, bursting upward under Ygerne's influence from the dry roots of the old, were in an instant shrivelled and killed. He came to see that in an old world there was no basic law but that law which had held from the first day in the new world. There was no good; bad was only a term coined for fools by other

fools. Each man had his life given to him, and he could do with it as he saw fit. Each wild thing in the depths of the North Woods had its life given to it to do with as it saw fit. Each created being, were it not maudlin, strove for itself alone. It took its own food where it could get it, rending it with bared teeth and bloody jaws from the weaker creature that had preyed upon a still weaker. It made its lair where it chose, crushing under its careless body those other still lesser things which had not sense enough or the opportunity to slip out from under it. Love, as man looked upon it or pretended to look upon it, was no real emotion but a poetical illusion. Nor was it so much as truly poetical, since poetry is truth and this thing was a lie. There was no love but the old, primal love of life, a blind, unreasoning instinct. He did not love Ygerne; he had never loved Ygerne because, in the nature of nature, there could be no such thing as such a love.

But hatred was another matter. That was nature. A man, with all of his bluster, cannot get away from nature. Don't the winters freeze and kill him? Doesn't water drown him, fire burn him? Love had no place in nature; hatred was a part of the one law, the primal law. The wolf kills the rabbit in hot rage; the black ant tears down the soft-bodied caterpillar not so much in hunger as in wrath.

The lower order of created beings seemed to Drennen to be the truly higher order. For they did not philosophise; they killed their prey. They did not reason and thus follow a blind goddess; they moved as their swift instincts dictated and made no mistake. Now he did not need to bolster up his purpose with seeking to wander through the thousand lanes of reason's labyrinth; he did not need to seek the fallacies of logic to tell him why he hated Ygerne Bellaire and Marc Lemarc and Sefton and the Mexican. He hated them. There the fact began and ended. One by one he would kill them until he came to Ygerne. And if in her eyes he saw that the terror of death was greater than the terror of the suffering he could inflict upon her living, then he would kill her.

At first he thought only of these four. But after a while in his thoughts there was room for another. . . . John Harper Drennen, masquerading as Marshall Sothern. Drennen sneered at his old hero. The old man was a fool like so many other fools. He had committed what the world calls a crime and the weight of it had shown upon him. Drennen's sneer was not for the wrong done but for the weakness of allowing suffering to come afterward. The old man had seemed glad, touched almost to tears, when his son had paid off the old score. . . . And now

Drennen's sneer was for himself. Why had he not kept that forty thousand dollars? Money meant power and power was all that he wanted. Power to crush men who would have crushed him had they been able; power to seek his prey where he would and to pull it down.

Ygerne's note he never read the second time. He had had no need to. He burned the paper and washed his hands free of the ashes which he had crumpled in his palm.

The third day he rose early, saddled Major and left the Settlement, riding slowly toward Lebarge. He had an idea that they might have gone there to take the train. When half way to the railroad he met a man who was pushing on strongly toward the north. The man stopped and accosted him. It was the mounted police officer, Lieutenant Max.

"Mr. Drennen," said the lieutenant bruskly coming straight to the business in hand after his way; "you come from MacLeod's?"

"Yes."

"You know two men named Sefton and Lemarc? And a girl named Bellaire?"

"Yes."

"Were they in MacLeod's when you left?"

"Why do you ask?" countered Drennen sharply.

"The law wants them," replied the lieutenant.

Drennen laughed.

"So do I!" he cried as he spurred his horse out of the trail, turning eastward now, heading at random for Fanning instead of Lebarge.

As he forded the Little MacLeod he was cursing Max.

"Damn him," he muttered. "Are there not enough cheap law breakers? Why must he seek to do my work for me?"

So began Drennen's quest for three men and one girl with grey eyes and a sweet body that was like a song, a girl who had awakened the old, dormant good in him and then had driven him so deep into the black chasm that no light entered where he was.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LONG TRAIL

EACH day that passed set its seal deeper into the heart and soul of David Drennen. His eyes grew harder, his mouth sterner. There came into his face the lines of his relentless hatred. Sinister and morose and implacable, biding his time and nursing his purpose, he grew to be more than ever before the lone wolf. His lips which had long ago forgo en how to smile were constantly set in an ugly snarl. His purpose possessed him so completely that it had grown into an obsession. It became little less than maniacal.

He seemed a man whose emotions were gone, swallowed up in a cool determination. There came no flush to his face, no quickened beating of his heart when the trail seemed hot before him, no evidence of disappointment when again and again he learned that he had followed a false scent and that he was no nearer his prey than he had been at the beginning. He was still unhurrying as when he had ridden out of MacLeod's Settlement. He would find what he sought to-day

or ten years from to-day. His vengeance would lose nothing through delay. On the other hand, it would fall the heavier. Of late he had become endowed with an infinite patience.

The last thought in his brain at night was the first thought when he woke. It was unchanging day after day, week after week, month after month. If he must wait even longer it would remain unaltered year after year.

His eyes had grown to be keener than knives, restless, watchful, bright with suspicion. Nowhere throughout the breadth of the land did he have a friend. What he felt for others was paid back to him in his own currency: distrust, dislike, silence.

But, through whatever far distances he went, he was generally known by repute and inspired interest. Men stood aloof but they watched him and spoke of him among themselves. No longer did they call him No-luck Drennen. He came to be known as Lucky Drennen. Word had gone about that it was indeed true that he had rediscovered the old, lost Golden Girl and that he had made a fortune from its sale to the Northwestern people. The mine was operating already; experts said that it was greater than the Duchess which electrified the mining world in 1897 when Copworth and Kennely brought it into prominence; and the Golden Girl was paying a royalty to David Dren-

nen. Drennen himself did not know how his account at the Lebarge bank took upon itself new importance every third month when Marshall Sothern deposited the tenth share of the net receipts.

Seeking Ygerne Bellaire and those with her, Drennen had gone from Fanning into Whirlwind Valley, across the Pass and into the forests beyond Neuve Patrie. He had followed rumours of three men and a woman and after six or seven weeks came upon them, trappers and the wife of one of them. He showed nothing of his emotions as he stared at them with cold, hard eyes. He went back to Fanning, crossed the MacLeod to Brunswick Towers and to the new village of Qu' Appelle. Spring had passed into summer and he had had no clue which was not a lie like the first. In all seeming the earth had opened to receive those whom he followed.

Since he so seldom spoke, since when he did it was to ask concerning three men and a woman, those who knew anything of him at all knew that he was seeking Sefton, Lemarc, Garcia and a girl whom those who had heard of her from the men of MacLeod's Settlement, called "the Princess." A figure of interest already, Drennen gained double interest now.

"He'll find them one day, *mes chers,*" grunted the big blacksmith at St. Anne's. "He'll do any-

thing, that man. *Le bon Diable* is his papa. *Hein? Voyez, mon petit stupide!* Last week, because he needs no more and because the devil likes him, he finds gold again in the Nez Cassé! *Nom d'un gros porc!* But who has dreamed to find gold in the Nez Cassé? Oho! Some day he comes up with three man and *la princesse.* And then . . ."

He broke off, plunging his hot iron into his tub of water, so that the hissing of the heated metal and the angry puff of steam might conclude in fitting eloquence the thing he had in mind.

Once, just after Drennen had for the second time in six months found gold, he heard the new epithet which had been given him: Lucky Drennen. He turned and stared at the man who had spoken the name so that the fellow fell back, flushing and paling under the terrible eyes. Then, with his snarling laugh, Drennen passed on.

Until the winter came to lock the gateways into the mountains he was everywhere the adventurous were pushing in the land of the North Woods. He was the last man to take the trail from Gabrielle to the open.

But though winter lifted a frozen hand to drive him back he did not for a single day give over his search. He went then down to the railroads. Banff knew him and came to know just as much of his story as it could guess from the eternal

question in his heart and now and then on his lips, and from the fact that he had money. Vancouver knew him, coming and going where a man might search such quarry as his, in gambling halls, high and low, in cafés, at hotels. For he had had a hint that perhaps Ygerne and the men with her had gone on to Vancouver.

In January he drew heavily against his account in the bank of Lebarge. The money, or at least a great part of it, went to a detective agency in Vancouver, another in Victoria, another even as far east as Quebec. Money went also to New Orleans and brought him no little information of the earlier lives of Ygerne Bellaire and Marc Lemarc, together with the assurance that neither of them had returned to the South.

Thus he learned the story which he had refused to hear from her own lips, the reason of her flight from New Orleans. Having no parents living, she had lived in the household of her guardian, a merchant named Jules Bondaine. She had had trouble with Bondaine, the cause of the affair not being clearly understood except by Bondaine himself, the girl and, perhaps, Marc Lemarc, her cousin. The confidential agency in the southern city to which Drennen had turned apprised him of these facts and let him draw his own deductions: It was known that Lemarc was a suitor for the girl's hand; that

Bondaine had seemed very strongly to favour Lemarc; that Bondaine was high-handed, Ygerne Bellaire high-tempered; that, at a time when Mme. Bondaine and her two daughters were away from home over night, Bondaine and the girl had a hot dispute; that that night, while in the library, Ygerne Bellaire shot her guardian; that he would in all probability have died had it not been for the opportune presence of Marc Lemarc, even the household servants being out; that that night Ygerne Bellaire left New Orleans and had not been heard of since by Bondaine or the authorities.

"Appearances would indicate," ran a little initialled note at the end of the report, "that Bondaine and Lemarc had been in some way trying to coerce Miss Bellaire and that she had shot her way out of the discussion. It is to be inferred, however, that she made up with her cousin, as he dissappeared the same night and (merely rumoured) was seen with her upon the night train out of Baton Rouge."

Throughout the winter Drennen pressed the search as his instinct or some chance hint directed. No small part of his plan was to keep in touch with the movements of Lieutenant Max of the Northwest Mounted. He knew that the young officer was almost as single purposed and determined as himself; he learned that as the winter

went by Max had met with no success. From Max himself, encountered in February in Revelstoke, he learned why the law wanted Sefton and Lemarc. There were in all five complaints lodged against them, four of them being the same thing, namely, the obtaining of large sums of money under false pretences. The fourth of these complaints had been lodged by no less a person than big Kootanie George.

"They came to George with a cock and bull story about buried treasure," grunted Max. "A gag as old as the moon and as easy to see on a clear night! It's rather strange," and he set his keen eyes searchingly upon Drennen's impassive face, "that they didn't take a chance on you."

"I'm called Lucky Drennen nowadays," answered Drennen coolly. "Maybe my luck was just beginning then."

The fifth charge lay against Sefton. He had brought an unsavory reputation with him from the States, and there would be other charges against him from that quarter. He had mixed with a bad crowd in Vancouver, had gotten into a gambling concern, "on the right side of the table," and had "slit his own pardner's throat, both figuratively and literally, making away with the boodle."

"Ten years ago they might have got away with this sort of thing," said Max. "It's too late now.

The law's come and come to stay. I'm going to get them, and I'm going to do it before snow flies again."

Drennen shrugged. Max wouldn't get them at all; he, David Drennen, was going to see to that. This was just a part of Max's duty; it was the supreme desire of Drennen's life.

Although, during the cold, white months, Drennen was much back and forth along the railroad, he avoided Fort Wayland which was now the headquarters of the western division of the Northwestern Mining Company. Since the late spring day when he had left Lebarge to return to MacLeod's Settlement, he had not seen Marshall Sothern. Once, in the late autumn, he had found a letter from Sothern waiting for him at the bank in Lebarge. He left a brief answer to be forwarded, saying simply:

"I want to see you, but not now. After I have finished the work which I have to do, perhaps when next spring comes, we can take our hunting trip."

When the spring came it brought Drennen with it into the North Woods. He knew that the three whom he sought, the four counting Garcia whom he had not forgotten, might have slipped down across the border and into the States. But he did not believe that they had done so. The

law was looking for them there, too, and they would stay here until the law had had time to forget them a little.

Again came long, monotonous months of seeking which were to end as they had begun. He pushed further north than he had been before, taking long trails stubbornly, his muscles grown like iron as he drove them to new tasks. He skirted the Bad Water country, made his way through Ste. Marie, St. Stephen, Bois du Lac, Haut Verre, Louise la Reine, and dipped into the unknown region of Sasnokee-keewan. He caught a false rumour and turned back, threading the Forest d'Enfer, coming again through Bois du Lac and into Sasnokee-keewan late in August. Dissappointment again, and again he turned toward the Nine Lakes. At Belle Fortune, the first stop, the last village he would see for many days, he met Marshall Sothern.

Sothern was standing in front of the village inn, his hand upon the lead-rope of a sturdy pack mule. The two men looked at each other intently, Drennen showing no surprise, Sothern experiencing none. It was the older man who first put out his hand.

"I've been looking for you, Dave," he said quietly. "I'm taking my vacation, the first in seven years. I've followed you from the railroad. We're going to take our trip together now."

Drennen nodded.

"I'm glad to see you, sir," he answered quietly.

"Which way are you headed now?" asked Sothern.

"It doesn't matter. I am in no hurry. I was going towad the Nine Lakes, but . . ."

"You think that they have gone that way?"

Again Drennen nodded; again he failed to manifest any surprise.

"I am not sure," he said. "But the only way to be sure is to go and find out."

So together father and son packed out of Belle Fortune, headed toward the Nine Lakes in the heart of the unknown land of Sasnokee-keewan. Unknown because it is a land of short summers and long, hard winters; because no man had ever found the precious metals here; because there is little game such as trappers venture into the far out places to get; because it is broken, rough, inhospitable. But, for a thousandth time, a vague rumour had come to Drennen that those whom he sought had pushed on here ahead of him and methodically he was running down each rumour.

Perhaps not a hundred men in a hundred years had come here before them. The forests, tall and black and filled with gloom, were about them everywhere. Their trail they made, and there were days when from sunrise to sunset they did

not progress five miles. Their two pack animals found insecure footing; death awaited them hourly upon many a day at the bottom of some sheer walled cliff. They climbed with the sharp slopes on the mountains, they dropped down into the narrow, flinty cañons, they heard only the swish of tree tops and the quarrelling of streams lost to their eyes in the depths below them. And they came in two weeks to Blue Lake having seen no other man or other trail than their own.

They were silent days. Neither man asked a question of the other and neither referred to what lay deepest in his own breast. There was sympathy between them, and it grew stronger day by day, but it was a sympathy akin to that of the solitudes, none the less eloquent because it was wordless. Sothern informed Drennen once, out of the customary silence about the evening camp fire, that he was taking an indefinite vacation; that there was a man in his place with the Northwestern who was amply qualified to remain there permanently if Sothern did not come back at all.

They sought to water at Blue Lake, so little known then and now already one of the curiosities of the North and found its waters both luke warm and salty. Although the lake is less than a quarter of a mile long they were two hours in reaching the head. The mountains come down steeply on all sides, the timber stands thick,

boulders are scattered everywhere, and it was already dark.

This is the first of the Nine Lakes when one approaches from the south. Less than a hundred yards further north, its surface a third of that distance above the level of Blue Lake, is Lake Wachong. It has no visible connection with Blue Lake except when, with the heavy spring thaw, there is a thin trickle of water down the boulders. Here they camped for the night.

"We would have seen a trail if they had gone ahead of us this year, Dave," Sothern remarked, referring for the first time in many days to the matter which was always in Drennen's mind.

"There's another way in," Drennen told him. "They'd have gone that way. It's north of here and easier. But we save forty or fifty miles this way."

There had been a recent discovery of gold at a little place called Ruminoff Shanty, newly named Gold River. This, lying still eighty miles to the north, was Drennen's objective point. The old rumour had come to him a shade more definite this time. In the crowd pushing northward had been three men and a woman, one of the men looked like a Mexican and the woman was young and of rare beauty. But that had not been all. A man named Kootanie George with another man wearing the uniform of the Royal Northwest Mounted

had followed them. These had all gone by the beaten trail; Drennen saw that if he came before Kootanie George and Max to the four he sought he must take his chances with the short cut.

The next night they camped at the upper end of the fourth of the string of little lakes. And that evening they saw, far off to the westward, the faint hint of smoke against the early stars, the up-flying sparks, which spoke of another campfire upon the crest of the ridge.

The old man bent his penetrating gaze upon his son. Drennen's face, as usual, was impassive.

"My boy," said Sothern very gently, "you are sure that you have made no mistake? The girl is no better than her companions?"

"They merely kill a man for his gold," returned Drennen steadily. "She plays with a man's soul and kills it when she has done."

There were deep lines of sadness about Sothern's mouth; the eyes which forsook Drennen's face and turned to the glitter of the stars were unutterably sad.

"The sins of the father . . ." he muttered. Then suddenly, an electric change in the man, he flung himself to his feet, his hands thrown out toward his son.

"By God! Dave," he cried harshly; "they're not worth it! Let them go! We can turn off here where the world is good because men haven't

come into it. The mountains can draw the poison out of a man's heart, Dave. There is room for the two of us, boy, for you and me on a trail of our own. Leave them for Max and Kootanie George. . . . Come with me. Do you hear me, Dave, boy? We don't need the world now we've . . . we've got each other!"

Drennen shook his head.

"I've got my work to do," he said quietly. "I think it'll be done soon now. And then . . . then we'll go away together, Dad. Just the two of us."

CHAPTER XX

THE FIRES WHICH PURIFY

THE camp fire which the two men had seen had not been that of Ygerne and her companions. Upon the afternoon of the second day Drennen and Sothern, still working northward along the chain of lakes, came to unmistakable signs of a fresh trail, made by two men, turning in from the westward. In the wet sand of a rivulet were the tracks. One was of an unusually large boot, the other of a smaller boot with a higher heel that had sunk deep.

"Kootanie George and Lieutenant Max, I think," announced Drennen. "It's a fair bet, since they're both somewhere in the neighbourhood and may well enough be travelling together. They've gone on ahead. . . ."

They travelled late that afternoon, Drennen setting a hard pace, seemingly forgetful of the man who followed. Drennen's eyes had grown bright as with fever; for the first time he showed a hint of excitement through the stern mask of his face. He felt strangely assured that he had come

close to the end of a long trail. But that was not the thought which caused his excitement. It was the fear that perhaps Kootanie George and Max might first come up with the quarry.

Signs of fatigue showed upon Marshall Sothern an hour before they made camp. Drennen sought and failed to hide the restlessness upon him. The next morning, a full hour before the customary ime for making the start for the day, Drennen had thrown the half diamond hitch which bespoke readiness. They reached Lake Nopong before noon and all day fought their way northward along its shore. Before night came they had heard a rifle shot perhaps a mile further on. A rifle shot might mean anything. No doubt it merely told of a shot at a chance deer. But Drennen's anxiety, already marked, grew greater.

Drennen left their camp fire when they had made their evening meal and climbed the little cliffs standing at the skirt of the strip of valley land east of Lake Nopong. Half an hour later he came back. Sothern, removing his pipe from his mouth, looked up expectantly.

"I think I can make out their camp fire," Drennen said, speaking slowly. "I imagine an hour would bring us up with them."

Sothern knocked out his pipe and got to his feet. Tightening the pack upon his mule's back he removed the rifle which had always ridden

there and carried it in his hand. Drennen's own rifle remained on his pack; he did not seem to have noticed Sothern's act.

Two hours later, sending before them an announcement of their approach in a rattle of loose stones down a steep trail, they came up with the two men whom they had followed these last few days. They were Lieutenant Max and the big Canadian and the two were not alone. Drennen, walking a little ahead of his father, came to a dead halt, his body grown suddenly rigid. He had seen that there was a second camp fire, a tiny blaze of dry fagots not twenty steps from the first but partially screened by the undergrowth among the trees, and that the slender form of a woman bent over it. His pause was only momentary; when he came on his face gave no sign of the emotion that had been riding him nor of the old disappointment again as he saw that the woman was not Ygerne but Ernestine Dumont.

Lieutenant Max, a rifle across the hollow of his arm, stepped out to meet them. Not knowing who his guests were he moved so that the firelight was no longer just behind him, so that he was in the shadows. Kootanie George, upon his knees, holding a bit of fresh meat out over the fire upon a green, sharpened stick, turned his head but did not move his great body.

"Who is it?" demanded Max sharply. And

then, before an answer had come, he saw who they were and cried out: "Why, it's David Drennen! And Mr. Sothern! Gad, I never thought to see you two here!"

He came forward and shook hands warmly, showing an especial pleasure in meeting Marshall Sothern again. The eyes of both men kindled as they gripped hands, in Sothern's a look of affection, in Max's an expression compounded of liking and respect.

Max had finished his meal; George, his appetite in keeping with his size, was doing his last bit of cooking; Ernestine, bending over her own lonely blaze, was seeking to warm a body which the fresh evening had chilled, a body which looked thinner and withal more girlish than it had looked for many a day. The face which she turned toward the new arrivals with faint curiosity, was paler than it had been of yore; her eyes seemed larger; there were traces of suffering which she had not sought to hide.

Lieutenant Max was unmistakably glad to welcome Drennen and Sothern to camp. The atmosphere hovering about the trio upon whom father and son had come was not to be mistaken even in the half gloom. There was nothing in common between the officer and the big Canadian beyond their present community of interest in coming up with the fugitives whom the law

sought through Max and revenge quested through Kootanie. And Ernestine, though with them, was distinctly not of them. She was pitifully aloof, the broad expanse of George's back turned toward her fire speaking eloquently.

"You are on a hunting trip, I take it?" offered Max as they sat down, each man having brought out and lighted his pipe. "Just pleasure of course? There's no gold in here, you know," he ended with a laugh.

Sothern turned his eyes toward Drennen and brought them back to the fire without answering. Max's eyes upon him Drennen spoke simply.

"A hunting trip, yes. Hunting the same game you are after."

Ernestine looked up quickly, her hands clenching spasmodically. George turned his meat, spat into the coals, and sought for salt.

"Mr. Drennen," said the lieutenant coldly, "it's just as well to understand each other right now. I represent the law here; the law at so early a stage as this considers no personal equation. A private quarrel must stand aside. I know what you mean; you know what I mean."

"Lieutenant," answered Drennen gravely, "the law is not yet full grown in the North Woods. Here a man steps aside for nothing. Yes, as you say, I think we understand each other."

"By God!" cried Max angrily, "I know what

is in your heart, yours and George's here! It's murder; that's the name for it! And I tell you that you are going to keep your hands off! When we find these people they are my prisoners, it's my sworn duty to lead them back to a place where they can stand trial, and I am going to take them. Remember that."

Drennen, having spoken all that he could have said if he talked all night long, made no answer. Ernestine, her two hands at her breast, crouched rocking back and forth, in a sort of silent agony. George, eating swiftly and noisily, did not look up.

In an instant the old atmosphere which had hovered over the camp came back, electrically charged with distrust, constraint, aloofness. Sothern's heavy brows were drawn low, the firelight showing deep, black shadows in the furrows of his forehead. In a moment he got to his feet and went to where Ernestine sat, his hat in his hand, kind words of greeting upon his lips for a lonely woman. She grew suddenly sullen; in a moment the sullen mood melted in a burst of tears, and she was talking with him incoherently.

George and Drennen had not met to speak since that night, long ago, when they had diced and fought at Père Marquette's. Now neither gave the least sign that he had seen the other.

* * * * * * * *

When one, life ended, goes down into the grave that grass may grow above him and men walk over his quiet body, are the doors of his hell swinging open that he may enter, or are they softly closing behind him? Are the fires of hell venomous tongues that bite deep to punish with their torture when it is too late? or are they flames which cleanse and chasten while there is yet time? Ernestine Dumont, like many another, had lighted the fires with her own hands, seeing and understanding what it was that she did. For close to two years she had walked through the flames of her own kindling. And now, not waiting for the tardy retribution which comes all too late, she was already passing through the burning fires; she was closer than she knew to having the iron portals clang behind her, gently and forever. After labour comes rest; after suffering, peace.

Drennen had said, "There is no law here in the North Woods that a man may not push aside." He was thinking of such law as Lieutenant Max represented. Had he looked into his own heart; could he have looked into the hearts of Marshall Sothern, Ernestine Dumont, Kootanie George, even into the heart of Lieutenant Max, he would have known that his seeming truth was an obvious lie. There is another law which reaches even into the lawless North Woods and which says, "Transgress against me and not another but your-

self shall shape your punishment." Had he looked into the hearts of Ygerne Bellaire, of Sefton and Lemarc and Garcia, he would have beheld the same truth. He might have looked into the hearts of good men and bad and have found the same truth. For soon or late each man, be he walking as straight in the light as he knows how, be he crouching as low in the shadows as he may, ignites the sulphur and tinder of his own hell. The hell may be little or it may be a conflagration; it may flicker and die out or it may burn through life and lick luridly at the skies; but a man must light it and walk through it, since he is but man, and that he may be a man.

If Ernestine Dumont's body had appeared to grow wan and slender, her soul, long stifled, had found nourishment and had expanded. Under a sympathy emanating gently from Sothern she grew calm and spoke with him as she had not known she could speak. She was not the woman she had been two years ago, and yet no miracle had been wrought. She had sinned but she had suffered. The suffering had chastened her. A rebellious spirit always, she had become softened with a meekness which was not weakness but the dawning of understanding. She had struggled, she had known fatigue after violence and the God who had made the Law had ordained that after fatigue should come rest.

There was much she did not say which Sothern, having trod his own burning path, could divine.

She had offered to David Drennen a fierce passion which he neither could nor would accept. The hot breath of it had shaken her being, seared through her breast, blinded her eyes. She had flung herself upon Kootanie George, still seeing only Drennen through the blur of her passion; she had awakened love in Kootanie George, the strong love of a strong man, and she had not so much as seen it.

She had humiliated the Canadian before men. Had she fired the shot because she loved him he would have been proud instead of ashamed. But he had known that she had fired only because she wanted to hate David Drennen.

Seeing dimly what she had lost only when it was gone from her she had sought to bring it back by throwing herself at another man. Garcia had made light love to her beautifully after the exquisite manner of his kind, and had gone away when Ygerne had gone, with laughter in his gay heart and his song upon his lips for the woman who had taken Drennen's love. George had seen, had understood and his heart had grown still harder.

But now, at last, Ernestine knew to the full what she had been offered and had thrust aside.

She had come to see in Kootanie George the qualities of which a woman like her could be proud She had come to feel a strange sort of awe that George, who was no woman's man but always a man's man, had loved her. And it had been given to her at last to know that her passion for David Drennen had been as the passion of the moth for the candle. A new love came into her heart, rising to her throat, choking her; a love that was meek and devoted, that was now as much a part of her as were her hands and feet; an emotion that was the most unselfish, the most worthy and womanly she had ever felt. She had followed Kootanie George; she had at last come up with him; and now, George's back to her, she sat at her own little fire.

"Life is hard for us, Miss Dumont." Sothern laid his hand very gently upon her shoulder and smiled into her face. "But, I think . . . at the end . . . life is good."

"I have done everything wrong," she said slowly. "I have never had anything in life worth while . . . but George's love. And I threw that away."

"When a man has loved once he loves always," Sothern told her quietly. "And a thing like that you can't throw away."

Presently, from deep thoughtfulness, she said hesitantly:

"I want to talk to Mr. Drennen. There is something I must say to him."

"Let it wait a day or so," Sothern answered. "He is not himself right now. And George might misunderstand."

CHAPTER XXI

CHANCE HEARD IN THE NIGHT

BEFORE sunrise the five beings whose lives were so intimately intertwined and yet who were held by constraint one from the other, took up the trail. There was but one way to go and this fact alone held them together; they must keep close to the lake shore for upon the right the mountains swept upward in a series of cliffs and into a frowning barrier. Marshall Sothern and Ernestine, walking together in the rear, spoke little as the day wore on. Max, Drennen and Kootanie George, ahead, spoke not at all. In silence, never the elbow of one touching the coat of another, the three men felt and manifested the jealous rivalry which all day fought to place each one ahead of the others. George, fleeced as Drennen had been and at a time when the Canadian's soul had listened avidly to the voice of his wrath, embittered as Drennen was by the act of a woman, was scarcely less eager to be first than Drennen himself. And Max, reading the signs, grew watchful as his own eagerness mounted.

Before night they found the trail which Dren-

nen knew that, soon or late, he would come upon. Here, perhaps a week ago, certainly not more than ten days ago, two or three men and one woman had passed. They had had with them two or three pack animals and the trail, coming in abruptly from a cañon at the westward, was plain.

At nightfall they were at the foot of the sixth of the nine lakes, the broad trail running on straight along its marge. The fathomless, bluish water, looking in the dusk a mere rudely circular mirror which was in truth a liquid cone whose tip was hidden deep in the bowels of earth, lay in still serenity before them. On all sides the cliffs, sheer falls half a thousand, sometimes quite a thousand feet high, seemed actually to stoop their august, beetling brows forward that they might frown down upon their own unbroken reflections. There would be a pass through the mountains at the northern end of the lake, a deeply cleft gorge, maybe, but from here, with the first dimness of the new night upon everything, there seemed no way through.

Each man, the silent meal done, threw his bed where he saw fit, apart from the others. Sothern, having aided Ernestine, telling her good night and receiving a wan smile of gratitude, went back to the fire where Max was brooding. The lieutenant looked up, glad of the companionship. The

two men from silence grew to talk in low voices. Max had something he wanted to say and the opportunity for saying it seemed to have come. He looked about him, saw Drennen's form and George's through the trees, saw where Ernestine was stamping out the glowing embers of her fire, and began to speak. Something else he saw and forgot, its being of no importance to his brain. It was merely the pipe which Drennen had laid upon a stone near the camp fire and had left there when he had gone away.

But Drennen, being in no mood for sleep, missed his pipe. Coming back toward the fire a little later it happened that he approached behind the two men's backs and in the thick shadows. It happened, too, that they were very deep in their own thoughts and conversation and that they did not hear him until he had caught a part of their talk. After that Drennen, grown as still as the rocks about him, listened and made no sound. He had caught the words from Max:

". . . a man named Drennen; an embezzler. Not a common name, is it? I've a notion that this David Drennen is the son of that John Harper Drennen."

Drennen, listening, got nothing from this, but stood still, frowning and wondering. His eyes, upon Max's face outlined by the fire, took no note of Sothern's.

"We've got the report," went on Max thoughtfully, "that the other Drennen, John Harper Drennen, is somewhere in this country. Lord," and he laughed softly, "it would be some white feather in my cap if I could bring the old fox in, wouldn't it, Mr. Sothern? He's given the police the slip for a dozen years."

Now, Drennen, with a quick start of full understanding, looked anxiously at the old man. Sothern's face stood in clear relief against the fire. There came no change into it; he looked gravely at Max, drew a moment contemplatively at his pipe, and then in a voice grave and steady answered:

"John Harper Drennen. . . . I remember the name. The papers were full of it. But wasn't he reported to have died a long time ago?"

"A dodge as old as the hills," grunted Max. "And God knows it works often enough, at that. No, he isn't dead and he is somewhere in this corner of the Dominion. By Heaven!" his young voice rising with the ambition in it, "if it's in my run of luck to bring him in I'll go up for promotion in two days! And I'm going to get him!"

Sothern's smile, a little tense, seemed only the smile of age upon the vaunting ambition of youth.

"I am not the man to doubt your ability to do

pretty nearly anything you set your mind and hand to, Max," he said after a little. And then, "Isn't it a little strange that after all these years interest in John Harper Drennen should awake?"

"Not so strange," replied Max. "The odd thing, perhaps, is that David Drennen, the son, and the sort of man he seems to be, should have paid off his father's obligation of forty thousand dollars just as soon as he sold the Golden Girl to you people."

Sothern, offering no remark, looked merely casually interested. Max went on.

"That's the first thing which began to stimulate dormant interest," he said. "Queer, isn't it, that the most honest and unselfish and altogether praiseworthy thing he has ever been known to do should succeed chiefly in drawing attention to his father, so long thought dead? We've had our eyes on him for pretty close to a year now. I'm up a tree to know whether he knows his father is living, even."

"That's not all of the evidence you've got that John Harper Drennen is alive, is it?" Sothern's voice asked quietly.

"Lord, no. That's not evidence at all. In fact, there isn't any evidence; there's just a tip. There came a letter to the Chief in Montreal. I got a copy of it. It said merely: 'John Harper Drennen, wanted for embezzlement in New York,

is in hiding in the North Woods country. He is the father of David Drennen of MacLeod's Settlement. Watch young Drennen and you'll find the thief.' "

When Max paused, leaning toward the fire for a burning splinter of wood for his pipe, Sothern passed his hand swiftly across his eyes. As Max straightened up the old man said:

"The letter might have said more. It doesn't give you a great deal to work upon."

Max laughed.

"But it does. The letter wasn't signed, even, and was typewritten, so you'd say it wasn't worth reading twice. And yet I know right now who wrote it."

"Yes?"

"Yes." There was triumph unhidden in Max's voice, in his eyes turned full upon Sothern's. "For I've been after that man for more than seventeen months, the man who has cause to hate John Harper Drennen like poison, the man who'd like to entangle both the father and son in the mesh of the law. It's the man I'm going to get at the end of this trail, a man calling himself Sefton. And when I get him he's going to talk, he's going to identify John Harper Drennen, and I'm going to put the two of them where they'll see the sun through the bars for more years than is pleasant to look upon!"

Again there was silence and the calm smoking of pipes.

"Why do you tell me this, Max?" asked Sothern after a little.

Suddenly Max's hand shot out, resting upon Sothern's shoulder. Drennen started, his hands shutting tight, as he waited breathlessly for the words: "John Harper Drennen, you are my prisoner!" He fancied that he saw Sothern's body shaken with a little tremor. The words which he heard at last in Max's quiet voice were these:

"I tell you, Mr. Sothern, because I come pretty near the telling of everything to you. Because for six years you have been more a father to me than my own father ever was. Because everything that I am I owe to you. You set my feet in the right path, and now that I am succeeding, for by God, success is coming to me, I want you to know it! I have never talked to you of the things which I have felt most. . . ." For a moment he broke off; Drennen fancied his eyes glistened and that he had choked on the simple words. "You know what I mean . . . you don't think I'm a sentimental fool, do you?"

Sothern, his face white but his expression showing nothing, his voice grave and calm, dropped his own hand gently upon the lieutenant's shoulder.

"Max, my boy," he said simply, "I know you'll succeed. I've always known that. But, old fellow, I think you've got the hardest work of your life ahead of you. No, I don't think you are a sentimental fool. We are just in the forests together, and the solitude and the starlight up yonder and the bigness of the open night are working their wills upon us. Just remember one thing, Max," and his voice grew a shade sterner, "when the hard time comes don't let your heart-strings get mixed up with your sworn duty. If you did I'd be ashamed of you, not proud, my boy."

Drennen slipped away through the dark. He came to his bed under the trees and went on, walking swiftly. For the first time in many long months a new emotion was upon him, riding him hard. He forgot Ygerne for the moment; forgot his own wrong and his own vengeance. He looked at the stars and they seemed far away and dim; the shadows about him were like blackness intensified into tangible things.

When at last he came back to his bed the fires were out; all the others had gone to their rest. He fancied, however, that none of them slept. He pictured each one, his own father, Kootanie George, Ernestine, Lieutenant Max, lying wide awake, staring up into the stars, each one busy

with his own destiny. What pitiful pictures are projected into the calm of the star-set skies from the wretched turmoil of fevered brains!

"I must come to Sefton first!"

It was Drennen's last thought that night. His first thought in the dim dawn was:

"I must come to Sefton first!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE PATH DOWN THE CLIFF

IN the thick darkness half way between midnight and the first glimmer of the new day Drennen awoke. That he must silence Sefton before Max came up with him was the thought awaking with him. He was fully conscious of his purpose before he knew what it was that had awakened him.

Quite close to him was the noise of breaking brush and snapping twigs. Evidenly one of the pack animals had broken its tie-rope. He lifted himself upon his elbow, frowning into the darkness. The horse was not ten feet from him and yet it was hard to distinguish that darker blot in the darkness which bespoke the brute's body.

"What is it?"

It was the voice of Kootanie George from the big Canadian's bed some fifty feet away. It was the first time George had spoken to Drennen. Drennen answered quietly:

"One of the horses has broken his rope."

Knowing that the animal might wander back

along the trail and cause no little delay in the morning, Drennen slipped on his boots and went to tie him. The horse, seeing where the man could not, drew back toward the cliffs. Drennen, led by the noise of breaking underbrush, at last was enabled to make out distinctly the looming form in a little clearing. Stooping swiftly, through a random clutch at the ground, he was lucky enough to sieze the end of the broken rope.

"It's Black Ben," he thought. "Max's horse."

A sudden temptation came to him. Puzzling it over he led the horse slowly toward the grassy flat under the cliffs where the others were tethered. Suppose that he turned Max's horse loose? And Kootanie's? And that he should head them back along the trail? Not a pretty trick to play, but was now the time for nicety? It would mean delay, not for Drennen, but for Kootanie and Max . . . it might mean the opportunity he wanted, to come up with Sefton before the others.

He passed close to where George lay. The Canadian had again drawn up his blanket and was going back to sleep. The others were sleeping. It was too dark for them to see what he was doing. Too dark for him to more than make out the forms of the other horses when he came to the flat under the cliffs. And by that time he had made up his mind; he would take advantage of

whatever came to his hand and ask no questions; he would find George's pack animal in a moment and would then lead the two of them around the camp and turn them loose.

Had he come to George's horse first he would have done so. But it chanced that the first horse across whose tether he tripped was a big black animal with the white strip from below the ears to the nostrils showing in the gloom to which Drennen's eyes were accustomed now. This was Lieutenant Max's horse, Black Ben! Then the horse he was leading . . .

He swung about swiftly, gathering up the slackened rope, coming close to the horse what had awakened him. It was like Black Ben, easily to be mistaken even in a better light than this . . . but it was not George's horse nor yet Max's. . . .

"A strange horse, here!" was his swift thought. "Whose?"

He ran his hands along the big brute's back. There was no saddle. About the neck only a knotted rope. His hands ran on to the dragging end of the rope. The strands were rough there, unequal, bespeaking a tether snapped. He noted now, too, that the rope was damp and a little muddy.

"He's come down the trail from the north. We are close to Sefton's camp."

From the north because there was no place

which Drennen remembered having passed during the end of the day where a horse could muddy a dragging rope. The lake shore was sand and gravel. And, before he had gone to bed that night, he had seen a straggling stream which a little further on ran across the morrow's trail, making shallow ponds in the grass, the banks oozy mud.

Tying the strange horse swiftly, Drennen went back to his bed. He found his rifle and cartridge belt, filled his pockets hit or miss from his food pack, and, making no noise, returned to the flat. Again leading the strange horse he pushed on, up trail, toward the muddy brook.

Too dark to see more than the lowering mass of trees, the blackness of the ground looking a bottomless pit under foot, the wall of cliffs standing up against the stars. But slowly he could find his way to the creek, across, and along the lake shore.

Again and again he stumbled against a boulder or tree trunk or clump of bushes. He cursed his eyes for fools, drew back and around the obstacle and pushed on. He would make little speed this way, but there might arise the situation in which every moment would be golden.

After a little an inspiration came to him and he acted upon it swiftly. He let the rope out through his fingers and holding it at the broken

end drove the horse on ahead of him, calculating upon the fact that it could see even if he could not, and having been over the trail once would travel it again in the darkness.

So Drennen made his way northward. Now he was making better time, perhaps a couple of miles an hour. By dawn he would be several miles ahead of the others, and then he could travel more rapidly.

But, before the dawn came, he must stop. He had come under the cliffs which stood tall and bleakly forbidding at the upper end of the lake. The horse came to a dead standstill. If there were a way up here, a trail through the cliffs, the animal seemed to have no knowledge of it and Drennen's blind groping could not discover it.

It was only through the mastery of a strong will, long seasoned and drilled, that Drennen could force himself at last to sit down and await the coming of the light. His soul was in turmoil. His mind was filled with broken fancies, tortured visions. In him the simplicity of a normal existence had been phantastically twisted into complication. Before him were Sefton and Lemarc and Garcia . . . and Ygerne Bellaire. Behind him were George and Ernestine with their warped lives, Sothern and Max with their souls upon the verge of convulsion. Max, young and straightforward, his sky clear to the star of his duty, was

sleeping in ignorance, while if he but knew he would be torn a thousand ways. And it seemed to Drennen that the restless thing in each of these lives, behind him and in front of him, raised its hissing head to dart venom into his own breast, to make for unrest and doubt there.

At last the objects about him were slowly restored to their own individual forms from the void of the night. The trees separated, the expanse of the lake grew grey and liquid, the cliffs showed their ancient battle scars. And the trodden earth held fresh and plain the trail he sought.

Leading the horse again, he climbed up from the level of the lake toward the cliff tops. The trail, hazardous enough at all times, looking now and then impossible, wound and twisted among the boulders, snaked its way into a narrow gorge, mounted along a bit of bench land clinging like a shelf to the mountain side, and in an hour's time brought him to the top.

Now the day was full upon him. Behind and below lay the lake he had just quitted. He could make out a plume of smoke where the impatience of Max and George would be bestirring itself. Ahead and below lay Red Deer Lake, a thousand dizzy feet down, seeming impossible of achievement from where Drennen stood. He pushed a stone over the rocks with his boot. He saw it

leap outward and drop, plummet wise, saw the white spray of the lake leap upward as the stone plunged into the water.

Drennen had turned the horse loose. From the hog's-back upon which he stood he could look down into a little valley lying to the eastward and could make out in it two more pack animals, tethered. He headed this one down the trail and then turned his eyes back toward Red Deer Lake and, across it, to the cliffs beyond. For there he had seen a second plume of smoke.

It seemed to him then that a man must have wings to reach that other line of cliffs, on the far side of the lake, from which the smoke was climbing upward. Everywhere the sheer precipices marched up to the rim of the blue laughter of the water below him, so that one might believe that neither man nor four-footed denizen of the forestland could come here to drink; that only the birds, dropping with folded wings, could visit its shore. But others had been here before him; and surely it was their smoke which curled upward from the far cliffs. If they had found a way to go on on foot, leaving their horses here, then he could find it. And he must find it quickly . . . before Max and George.

First he noted the location of the smoke toward which he sought to go, so that he would not miss it. Nature aided him, making the spot

distinctive. Everywhere the cliffs were barren, just rock and more rock, a jumble of great boulders strewn along sheer precipices, everywhere save alone in this one spot. But there was a scant table land, and from it a small grove of pines rose high in the blue of the brightening sky, their gnarled limbs still and sturdy. It was above this single noteworthy clump of ancient boled trees to be seen upon these inhospitable heights that the thin bluish smoke arose.

To Drennen, frowning across the gulf separating him and his quarry, there seemed but one conceivable reason why a human being should have sought to win a way to that rocky aerie. From its nature it was all but unscalable; from its position it commanded in limitless, sweeping view all possible paths of approach. Did Sefton's party seek a hiding place where defence even against great numbers would be a simple matter, this nest upon the cliff tops was the ideal spot.

Thus Drennen answered the riddle. But there were other riddles which he could not answer and which he gave over. Why had the horses been left where they would be found so readily? Why that careless beacon smoke where no man could fail to see it?

Max would see it and he would be hurrying, swifter than Drennen had come because now it was daylight. With the need of haste crying in

his ears Drennen experienced the slipping by of slow hours with nothing accomplished. Back and forth along the edge of the cliffs he searched eagerly, like some great, gaunt questing hound, baffled by a cold track. Sefton and those with him had come here, had found the way down, had gained the far side two miles away across the lake. They had gone before, so he knew that he could come after. But he grew feverish over the delay, thinking as much of Max behind as of Sefton in front.

Again and again he thought that he had found the way down only to be driven back and up when he had made a few perilous feet downward along the beetling fall of rock. He sought tracks and found nothing; there was nothing but hard rock here which kept no impress less than that of the tread of the passing centuries. He even went down into the little valley where the horses were, hoping that through some deep cleft chasm the trail led circuitously to the lake shore. But he came back, again baffled, again hurrying with the certainty upon him that Max, too, was hurrying.

The sun was three hours high when Drennen found what he sought. With the keen joy at the discovery there came deep wonder. It was the approach to the lake; but the wonder arose from the unexpected nature of the path itself. He had passed further and further north along the cliffs

until a couple of miles lay between him and the spot where this latest quest had begun. And he came now to a cleft in the rocks. On each hand the cliffs fell apart so that at the top the chasm measured perhaps ten or twelve feet. The chasm narrowed fifty feet below until it formed a great V. Below that Drennen could not see until he had made his precarious way down into the cut. And when he had come to what had appeared from above to be the closed angle of the V he found the rest of the way open to him. And the wonder arose from the obvious fact that there were many rude steps not nature-made but man-made. There were hand-holds scooped out here and there in the rock; foot-holds chiselled rudely; and all bore the mark of no little age. Grass grew scantily in the cracks; a young cedar, hardy, with crooked roots like the claws of a monster, stood in one of the deeper scooped hollows; the debris fallen into the man-made steps had accumulated through the generations. In one of these places, when he had gone downward a hundred feet, he came to a little space of soft soil which held the trampled impress of boots.

Now, his rifle slung to his back, his fingers gripping at cracks and seams and little knobs of stone, he made what speed he could. The way he followed led along a long, horizontal fissure

for a space, then dipped dangerously near the perpendicular, then slanted off so that the danger was less, greater speed possible. He did not look down to the lake, fearing the dizziness which might lay hold of him and whip him from the face of the cliffs like a fly caught in a rush of wind.

The thought entered his mind, "Ygerne Bellaire had gone on here before him!" He pictured her confident bearing as she climbed down, her capable hands clinging to the rocks, her fearless eyes as she looked down at the blue glint of the lake a thousand feet below, the red curve of her lips as she smiled her contempt of the danger. Be she what she might, Ygerne Bellaire was not the coward he had once thought all women.

He grew angry with himself for harbouring a thought into which a tinge of admiration for her entered. He was coming up with her soon; he sneered at himself and at her and crept on downward.

Again and again the way looked impossible; again and again he found the scooped-out handhold which carried him on. And yet it was another two hours before he had dropped the last ten feet to the narrow, pebbly shore of Red Deer Lake.

Now there would be no more lost time, no hesitation in finding the path he must follow. For

here, at the marge, were the tracks of those who had gone before. And there was but one way these could lead. For upon the left hand the cliffs came down to the water and there was no path; upon the right there was a six-foot strip of uneven beach.

The sudden sound of a voice shouting dropped down to him. Jerking his head up he made out the form of Lieutenant Max at the top of this devil's stairway down which he had just come. Drennen laughed shortly and turned northward along the lake shore. He had lost time but he would lose no more. He still had two hours the best of it; it would take Max fully that long to make the descent.

"When he comes up with me," was Drennen's quick thought, "my work will have been done!"

CHAPTER XXIII

CHÂTEAU BELLAIRE

NOW Drennen, having passed around the shore of Red Deer Lake, having often dipped his body into the icy water where there was little room to pass between the lake and the cliffs, having fought his way upward again much as he had travelled downward but by an easier path, came at last, in the late afternoon, to the grove of giant trees upon the crest of the great ridge. And, as he paused a moment, a new wonder was upon him.

He had expected to find here merely a rude camp; he found himself staring at a house under the trees! Such a house as he had never seen in all of his life, but a house none the less. It was screened from him by the tree trunks until he stood within fifty yards of it; it was disguised now in the very manner of its construction.

The corners were great stacks of high piled flat stones; across the rude columns lay tree trunks roughly squared with axes; the roof was a sloping shed-roof, steep pitched, made of saplings, cov-

ered a foot deep with loose soil. In this soil grew the hardy mountain grasses; even two or three young trees were seeking life here where the cones had fallen from the lofty branches of the mother trees. Over the great, square door was a long slab of wood, carefully cut into a thick board, the marks of the axe blades still showing. And inscribed deep into this board, the letters having been burned there with a red hot iron, were the words:

CHÂTEAU BELLAIRE.

Drennen's pause was brief. From the low, awkward building there were voices floating out to him. He had come to the end of the long trail. One voice, low toned and clear, drove the blood racing through his body. His hand shook upon his rifle stock. In spite of him a strange shiver ran through him. He knew now how only a woman, one woman, can bring to a man his heaven of joy, his hell of sorrows. And that woman, the one woman, was at last only fifty yards away! After all of these bitter empty months she was at last only fifty yards away!

He came on slowly, making no sound. He drew near the corner of the building. The voices came more distinctly, each word clear. The other voice was the musical utterance of Ramon Garcia.

Again Drennen stopped for a brief instant. Were Sefton and Lemarc in there, too?

Ygerne's laughter drove a frown into his eyes. His hand was steady now upon his rifle. Her laughter was like a child's, and a child's is like the music of God's own heaven. Drennen came on.

In another moment he stood at the wide door, looking in. There was a hunger in his eyes which he could not guess would ever come into them. He did not see Garcia just then, though the little Mexican stood out in full view, making the girl a sweeping, exaggerated bow after his manner. He did not notice the long bare floor nor yet the rough beams across the ceiling; he registered no mental picture of the deep throated, rock chimney, the rude, worm eaten table and benches, the few homemade objects scattered about the long room. He saw only Ygerne Bellaire, and the picture which she made would never grow dim in the man's mind though he lived a hundred years.

She stood upon a monster bear skin. Upon the rug, strewn about her carelessly, their bright discs adance with reflected light, a thousand minted gold pieces caught the glint of the low sun. Her head was thrown back, her arms lifted. Her eyes were filled with light, her red mouth curved to the gaity of her laughter. About her white throat was the dazzle of diamonds; upon

her bared white arms was the splendour of diamonds.

"My Countess!" murmured the Mexican, his eyes soft with the unhidden worship in them. "You are like a Lady who is born out from the dream of a poet! See!" He dropped suddenly to his knees, caught up the hem of her short skirt and pressed it to his lips. "You are the Queen of the Worl'!"

"At last," she cried, her voice ringing triumphantly, "I have come into my own! For it is mine, mine, I tell you! You shall have your share, and Sefton and Marc! But it is mine, the heritage of Paul Bellaire!"

As Garcia had stooped something had fallen from his breast. Rising swiftly he caught it up. It was a little faded bunch of field flowers.

"My share, señorita?" He laughed softly. "I am not come here for gol'. Me, I have this." He lifted the flowers, his eyes tender upon them. "With this I am more rich than the King of Spain!"

Drennen's dry laugh, the old, bitter snarl, cut through the room like a curse. They had not seen him; they had been too busy with their own thoughts. Now, as they whirled toward the door which framed him, Garcia's hand went swiftly to his pocket, Ygerne's face grew as white as death.

"So," said the Mexican softly. "You are come, señor!"

The muzzle of Drennen's rifle moved in a quick arc. It came to rest bearing upon Garcia's breast.

"Turn your back!" commanded Drennen sharply. He came well into the room, setting his own back to the wall so that, should Sefton and Lemarc come, he should be ready for them. "Do you hear me?" for Garcia had not stirred. "By God, I'll kill you . . ."

Garcia shrugged, and shrugging obeyed the command which he was in no position to disobey. And, as again Drennen's curt words came crisply to him, he obeyed, tossing his revolver aside so that it fell close to the wall. Then, with Ygerne's wide eyes upon them both, Garcia backed up to Drennen and Drennen searched him swiftly, removing a cruel-bladed knife.

"Your little flowers," sneered Drennen, "you can keep."

He caught a murderous gleam from Garcia's eyes.

"The man who would touch them, señor," the Mexican said softly, "would die if I have but my hands to kill!"

"And now, my fine Countess Ygerne," mocked Drennen, coming a step toward her. "Have you still your nice little habit . . ."

As though in answer her hand had sped toward

her bosom. But Drennen was too close to her, too quick and too strong. His grip set heavy, like steel, upon her wrist, he whipped out her weapon and tossed it to lie beside Garcia's.

"You brute," she said coolly.

He regarded her in silence, insolently. His eyes were bright and inexorable with their cold triumph.

"So," he said in a little, having passed over her remark just as he had ignored Garcia's, "in all of your lying to me there was some grain of truth! There was a Bellaire treasure and you have found it."

"Yes," she cried passionately, her hands clenched and grown bloodlessly white. "And I'll spend every cent of it to make you suffer for the things . . ."

"Not so fast," he taunted her. "Do you guess what I am going to do? Do you know that I am the one who is going to deal out the suffering? There is nothing in God's world you love . . . except it be yourself . . . as you love gold! To find is one thing; to keep is another."

"You mean," she cried angrily, "that you will try to rob me?"

"I mean," he retorted grimly, "that in a little while you and I are going out there to the edge of the cliffs. You shall watch me; you shall see your diamonds circle in the sun before they go down

into the lake! And then the gold is going where they go!"

It seemed to him that now, at last, was he Lucky Drennen indeed. Never had he known how to make this woman suffer; now he believed that the way was made plain before him.

"David Drennen," she said, the beauty of her face swept across with a fiery anger, "one of these days I am going to kill you!"

He laughed. He had waited long to stand there before her as he now stood, laughing at her. He had dreamed dreams of a time like this but always his dreamings had fallen short of the reality. He would hurt her and then, staring into her eyes, he would laugh at her. He saw the rush of blood flaming up redly in her face, saw it draw out, leaving her cheeks white, and the evil in him raised its head and hissed through his laughter.

"Sangre de Dios!" muttered the Mexican, twisting his head as he stood facing the wall. "He has gone mad!"

Suddenly Ygerne had whipped off necklace and bracelet and had thrust deep into her bosom the old famous French jewels which the gay Count of Bellaire had won across the green topped tables. It was Drennen's time to shrug.

"Put them where you please," he told her with his old lip-lifted sneer. "I'll get them. Put them

between your white breasts that are as cold and bloodless as the stones themselves. I'll get them."

"You . . . you unspeakable cur!" she panted, in a flash scarlet-faced.

Garcia was edging slowly, noiselessly along the wall toward the two revolvers, his and Ygerne's. Drennen whipped about upon him with a snapping curse.

"Stand where you are, do you hear? You go free of this when I am through . . . if you are not a fool! It is this girl I want. Her and Sefton! Where is Sefton?"

Ygerne, biting her lips into silence, her eyes flashing at him, her insulted breasts rising and falling passionately, answered him with her mute contempt. Garcia lifted his shoulders.

"With el señor Marco he is away for the horses. . . ."

"Liar!" said Drennen sternly. "What horses can climb these cliffs?"

"Don't answer his questions!" commanded Ygerne.

"Silence is as good as the lies I'd get," retorted Drennen.

He closed the heavy panelled door behind him, dropping into place an iron bolt which fastened staple and hasp. There was one other door at the far end of the long room; he moved toward it, at all times watching Garcia and Ygerne. Here

was a smaller room, perhaps a third the size of the first, without doors, its windows boarded up with thick ax-hewn slabs. The floor of this room had been wrenched loose and torn away; there were big chests still sunken in the soil beneath, the boxes crumbling and evidently broken in their hasty rifling.

He came back into the larger room. Sefton and Lemarc, when they came, must enter through the door at the front. And he could do nothing but wait, his heart burning with the feverish hope that they would come before Max and the others. He drew a bench close to the door and sat down, his face turned so that he could at once watch Ygerne and Garcia and not lose sight of the door. He rose again, almost immediately, picked up the two revolvers and the knife, dropped them to the floor under his bench and sat down again.

Ygerne in a little, her eyes never leaving his face, sat where she had been standing, upon the rug amidst the scattered gold. Now and then her fingers stole from her lap to the old coins about her; once or twice her fingers travelled slowly to her breast where the diamonds lay hidden.

Garcia did not move. As commanded he faced the wall. Once or twice only he turned his head a little, his eyes paying no heed to Drennen but seeking Ygerne. And his eyes were not gay now, but restless and troubled.

In a deep silence through which the faint murmur of the branches above the Château Bellaire spoke like a quiet sigh, they waited. To each, with his own bitter thoughts, the time writhed slowly like a wounded serpent.

Upon a little thing did many human destinies depend that summer afternoon. Though a man's destiny be always suspended by a mere silken thread, not always is it given to him to see the thread itself and know how fragile it is. Had Lieutenant Max been five minutes later in picking up Drennen's trail . . . had Sefton and Lemarc returned to the "château" five minutes earlier, God knows where the story would have ended.

As it was it was Max's tread which Drennen's eager ears first heard drawing near swiftly. And a moment later Max himself, with big Kootanie George at his heels and both Marshall Sothern and Ernestine hurrying after them, came running toward the strange building. Drennen at the door, his rifle laid across his arm, met them.

"Well?" snapped the officer. "What in hell's name have you done?"

Ygerne had leaped to her feet, a little glad cry upon her lips. No doubt she had thought that this was Sefton returning, Lemarc with him. She stood still, staring incredulously, as she saw who these others were. A strange man, with an air

of command about him . . . Kootanie George, his face convulsed with rage as his eyes met her own . . . Marshall Sothern . . . Ernestine!

"I came to find Captain Sefton," was Drennen's slow answer to the lieutenant's challenge. "He is not here. I am waiting for him."

"You have killed him!" shouted Max, pushing through the doorway.

"I have not," said Drennen quietly. "But I shall."

"The Mexican, Garcia!" snapped Max irritably. "And the girl. I have no warrant for them. Hell's bells! Where are the others?"

To answer his own question he strode toward the rear door. Half way down the long room he stopped with a muttered exclamation of surprise. He had seen the gold upon the old bear skin.

"Have they robbed the Bank of England?" he gasped.

From without came the sharp rattle of shod hoofs against the rocky ground.

"It is Sefton and Marco who return," murmured Garcia, his hand at his mustache, a look of great thoughtfulness in his eyes. "Now there will be another kind of talk!"

And he looked regretfully toward the revolver lying under Drennen's bench.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SPEAKING OF GUNS

MAX had heard, whirled and came running back to the door.

"Stand aside!" he called to Drennen. "Those men are my prisoners."

Drennen made no answer. Mindful of the weapons on the floor he caught them up and threw them far out into the underbrush. His rifle ready in both hands, his purpose standing naked in his eyes, he stepped out after Max.

"Curse you!" shouted Max over his shoulder. "If you interfere now I'll shoot you like a dog!"

Sefton and Lemarc, riding and leading two other horses, came into view through the trees. Evidently Garcia had not lied, evidently there was some roundabout trail from the far side of the lake, evidently, the treasure found, these men wished to lose no time in carrying it away with them.

They had not heard until they had seen; by that time they were not fifty yards away and Max's rifle bore unwaveringly upon Sefton's chest.

"Up with your hands, Sefton and Lemarc!" he called loudly. "In the name of the Law!"

"Fight it out, Sefton, if you are a man!" shouted Drennen, his own rifle at his shoulder. "I am going to kill you any way!"

Ernestine was crying out inarticulately; no one listened to the thing she was trying to say. She had waited too long. Marshall Sothern, a queer smile upon his lips which Drennen was never to forget, strode to his son's side.

"Dave," he said gently. "If you are doing this for me . . . let be! I have told Max."

"What do you mean?" muttered Drennen dully. "Told him what?"

"Who I am."

He laid his hand on the barrel of Drennen's rifle, forcing it downward. His son stared at him with wondering eyes.

"I don't understand. . . ."

Both Sefton and Lemarc, with one accord had jerked in their horses, their hands dropping the ropes of the animals they led and going the swift, certain way to the gun in the coat pocket.

"It's a hold-up, Marc!" cried Sefton, driving his heels into his horse's sides and coming on in defiance of the rifle still trained upon him. "Garcia!"

Garcia shrugged his shoulders and watched, having nothing else to do.

"Wait!" screamed Marc after Sefton. "Can't you see the uniform? He's one of the Mounted."

Sefton saw. He saw too that at the door was David Drennen; that at his side was Marshall Sothern; that big Kootanie George stood out, a little in front. His face went white; he jerked his horse back upon its haunches; his teeth cut, gnawing, at his lip. He saw and he understood. He knew that for him the play was over; he knew that within the old house was a fortune for many men and that he had had his hands on it and that it was not to be for him. His white face went whiter with the rage and despair upon him.

"It's you that did for me!" he yelled. "You, John Harper Drennen! You! Damn you . . . take that!"

In the first grip of the fury upon him he fired. Fired so that the short barrel of his revolver, spitting out the leaden pellets, grew hot. He was too close to miss. Marshall Sothern clutched at Drennen's arm and went down, sinking slowly, not so much as a groan bursting from his lips. And as he dropped Kootanie George fell with him, the big Canadian's broad chest taking the first of the flying bullets.

Drennen and Max fired almost at the same instant, the rifles snapping together. Too close to miss a target like that, and Sefton, clutching at

his horse's mane, slipped from the saddle and to the ground.

"Lemarc," shouted Max sternly, "come on! Your hands up or you get the same thing."

He had not seen old Marshall Sothern fall. Drennen was on his knees now, his father's head caught up in his lap, his face horrible with the grief upon it as he bent forward. The old man was badly hurt but conscious. His eyes went to David's, his hand sought to close about his son's. And Drennen, leaning lower as he saw the lips framing words, thought that he had not heard aright.

"Thank God!" was what Marshall Sothern was saying.

There had been the one sharp fusillade and the fight was over. Three men lay upon the ground, two of them having caught their death wounds. Sefton sprawled where he had fallen, alone. He would lie there until the life rattled out of his body. Ernestine, sobbing a moment, then very still, was over Kootanie George's body, her poor frail hands already red with his blood as she sought to lift him a little. George was looking up at her wonderingly. He did not understand; he could not understand yet. If she didn't love him, then why did she look at him like that?

Lemarc, his dark face a study in anger and

despair, lifted his two arms. Max, his eyes hard upon his prisoner, strode forward to disarm him and take him into closer custody. So, even yet, since neither Marshall Sothern nor Kootanie had uttered a loud outcry, the lieutenant was unconscious of all that had happened so few steps behind him.

The sun was entangled in the tree tops far to the westward, the red sunset already tingeing the sky. In a little the cool sting of the dusk would be in the air.

Drennen, stooping still further, slipped his arms about Marshall Sothern's body. As his father had carried him to his own dugout, so now did he bear his father into the house. He wanted no help; he was jealous of this duty. And, looking down into the white face at his shoulder, it seemed to him that the pain had gone out of it; that there was a deep joy for this wounded man to be gripped thus in the arms of his son.

Garcia, obeying two curt commands from Drennen, cleared the bearskin of its golden freight and builded a fire in the rock chimney. Very tenderly Drennen lay the old man down, seeking to give him what comfort there was to give.

Ygerne, trembling visibly now, her face white and sick, watched Drennen wordlessly. She had seen everything; she had marked how Sefton lay

where Max's and Drennen's bullets had found him; she had seen Kootanie George drop; she had seen Ernestine crouching over him; she had seen and had read the writing in the old man's face. Now her eyes were upon Drennen. And he did not see her.

"Dad," he said, a queer catch in his voice. "Dad. . . ."

The old man's stern eyes softened; a smile fought hard for its place upon his lips and in the end drove away for a little the pain there. There was just a flutter of his fingers as they sought to tighten about his son's.

"Davie," he whispered faintly.

Then he lay still, an iron will holding what little strength lay in him. David sought the wound and found . . . three. A harsh sob broke from him when he read the meaning that the three bleeding wounds spelled. He had seen men with their mortal wounds before. He knew that he might stop the outward flow of blood a little; that perhaps his father might live to see the sun come up. But he knew, and his father knew, that at last John Harper Drennen, good man or bad, was at last going to his reckoning.

Ygerne Bellaire, while she and Marshall Sothern had nursed David Drennen, had seen hourly all of the courtly, knightly gentleness and tenderness which was one side of the old man. Now

she came swiftly to the edge of the bearskin. She, too, went down upon her knees at Sothern's side, just opposite Drennen. Her hands did not tremble as they grew red with the spurting blood. She said nothing, but she helped Drennen, who, having looked at her once with terrible eyes, made no protest. Together they made bandages and sought to do what they could, Ygerne fastening the knots while Drennen lifted the prone body. When they had done the old man thanked them both silently, equally, with his eyes.

So Lieutenant Max found them when, driving Lemarc before him, he came into the room. The officer's face, as hard as rock, softened wonderfully as he cried out and came quickly to Marshall Sothern's side.

"Mr. Sothern!" he said harshly. "He got you . . . my God!"

"It saves you a nasty job, my boy," Sothern said gently. "And me much unhappiness. I'm old, Max, and I'm tired and my work's done. I'm glad, glad to go. . . ."

For a little he was silent, exhausted, his eyes closed. Then, the smile seeming to come more easily to the white lips, his eyes still shut, he murmured so that they leaned closer not to miss the words:

"God is good to me in the end. I have always been lonely . . . without your mamma, Davie.

And now I am going to her . . . with all I love in life telling me . . . good-bye. You, Max, my boy . . . you, Davie, my son . . . you, Ygerne, my daughter. . . ."

Ygerne, a sob shaking at her breast, rose swiftly and went out. But in a moment she was back, bringing with her a little flask of brandy. The eyes of Ramon Garcia, the only eyes in the room to follow her, grew unutterly sad.

A little of the brandy added fuel to the flickering fire of life in Marshall Sothern. At his command they propped him up, the rug under him, his shoulders against the wall at the side of the fireplace. Drennen's face again had grown impassive. Max had not opened his lips after his first outburst but in his eyes tears gathered, slowly spilling over upon his brown cheeks. Ygerne, as before, stood a little aloof.

"Davie," the old man said slowly, painfully, yet the words distinct through the mastery of his will; "I wanted to tell you the story while we were on the trail together . . . alone, out in the woods. But it is just as well now. Max, my boy, you will forgive me? I want just Davie here . . . and Ygerne."

Max turned swiftly, nodding, a new look in his eyes. He had said truly; this old man had been more than father to him. Like all men of strong passions Max knew jealousy; and now he

sought to hide the hurt that he should be sent away even though it be to make place for the son.

Max and Garcia and Lemarc went out, the door closing after them. Coming to where Kootanie George lay they saw that Ernestine's face was against his breast, that George's great arms were at last flung about her shoulders.

Meantime John Harper Drennen told his story. Knowing that his time was short, his strength waning, he gave only the essential facts without comment, making no defence for himself which did not lie upon the surface of these facts themselves.

John Harper Drennen had been the second vice-president of the Eastern Mines, Inc., New York. He had made his reputation as a man of clean probity, of unimpeachable honour. His influence became very great because his honesty was great. The first vice-president of the company was a man named Frayne. Just now Frayne lay dead outside with Max's and Drennen's bullets through his body.

Frayne . . . or Sefton . . . while nominally first vice-president was in actuality the manager of Eastern Mines. He had always been a man without principle but John Harper Drennen had believed in him. There came a time when the Eastern Mines threw a new scheme upon the market.

Frayne had engineered the plan and had made John Harper Drennen believe in it. John Harper Drennen, using his influence, had caused his friends to buy a total of one hundred thousand dollars of worthless stock.

Before the exposure came John Harper Drennen had had his eyes opened. He went to Frayne and Frayne laughed at him. He went higher up and found that the nominal president was under Frayne's thumb.

Drennen sought the way to make restitution to the friends who had been fleeced through his advice. He, himself, had not more than twenty-five thousand dollars available. Being in a position of trust in the company, he took from their vaults the remaining seventy-five thousand dollars. He gave the money, the whole hundred thousand, to a broker, instructing him to buy the worthless shares. He went to his friends, instructing them to unload. He saw that he had made restitution. Then, knowing that Frayne had cloaked his whole crooked deal in protective technicalities of the law, knowing that his act could be punished, he left New York.

He had sought to see his son, but David Drennen was out of town and there was no time. He went to Paris. At last, a body in the Seine gave him the opportunity to play at being dead. He wrote the note which later came to David. Then

he came to New York to find his son. But David had left.

Through the after years the old man had sought always to do two things: to return to the Eastern Mines the money which he had taken from the company; to find his son.

That was his story.

He lifted his eyes when it was done, studying anxiously his son's face.

"I have sinned against the laws of man," he said simply. "I have tried, Davie, not to sin against the laws of God."

Therein lay his only defence.

"Dad," whispered the son, his voice breaking now, the tears standing at last in his eyes as they had stood in Max's; "it is I who have sinned, being a man of little faith! Do you know how I worshipped you when I was a boy? Do you know how I love you now?"

He bent forward swiftly and . . . he was the impulsive, warm-hearted boy again . . . kissed his father. And a tear, falling, ran in the same course with a tear from the old man's eye. One a tear of heartbreaking sadness; one a tear of heartbreaking gladness.

"You will tell Max?" asked Marshall Sothern. "Poor old Max. And now . . . let them come in. I have lived so much alone . . . I want to die among my friends."

They stood, heads bared, faces drawn, about the figure which had again slipped down upon the bear skin. Max knelt and took the lax hand and kissed it.

"You are the greatest man in the world," he said incoherently. "Do you think I am ungrateful? Do you think I'd remember a thing like my sworn duty and forget all you've done for me, all . . ."

"A man is no man unless he does what he thinks is his duty, Max. I have tried to do mine. You would have done yours."

Ramon Garcia, standing a little apart, came softly forward.

"You die, señor?" he asked very gently.

The old man nodded while David Drennen looked up angrily at the interruption.

"You love your son?" Garcia asked, still very gently. "This Drennen is your son and you love him much?"

"Yes."

"Then I, Ramon Garcia, who have never done a good thing in my life, I do a good thing now! I give you something filled with sweetness to carry in your heart? For why?" He shrugged gracefully. "It is so short to tell, and maybe the telling make others happy, too. See. It is like this: Your son love the señorita de Bellaire. She love him. *Bueno.* I, too, love her. I cannot make

her happy and love me; so I will make her happy anyway. And you happy while you die, señor. And your son happy always."

They all looked at him wonderingly. He paused a moment, gathered what he had to say into as few words as might be and went on calmly.

"Señor David promise Miss Ygerne he stake Lemarc. He give Lemarc ten thousand dollars. Lemarc come back and say to the lady: 'He lie. He give me nothing. He say he give the money and more to the lady when she give herself to him . . . for a little while.' But the lady who had believe many lies will not believe this one. What then, *amigos?* Then Ramon Garcia, loving the lady for his own, tell Sefton and Lemarc what they shall do. He say Ernestine Dumont shall play sick; she shall say she die and that George hit her; she shall make Señor David take her in his arms, maybe. And we take the Señorita de Bellaire to see!"

A gasp broke from Ygerne; a look that no man might read sweeping into her eyes. Drennen knelt still, looking stunned. A look of great happiness came into the old man's face.

"Garcia," he said, "you are a gentleman! It is the truth . . . this is what Ernestine has wanted to tell David . . ."

Now, coming swiftly, came the time for a man to die. He died like a man, fearlessly. He had

made his hell knowing the thing he did; a hell not of filth and darkness but of fierce white flames that purified. He had walked through it, upright. He had lived without fear; he had done wrong but had done so that another, greater wrong might not be done; he had trodden his way manfully. He had suffered and had caused suffering. But he had not regretted. He had committed his one sin . . . if sin it were. After that his life had been clean. Not so much as a lie had come after, even a lie to save his own life. And in the end, the end coming swiftly now, it was well.

With David Drennen and Ygerne and Max close about him, his last sensation the touch of their hands, his last sight the sight of their tear-wet faces, knowing that when he was gone there would be one to comfort his son, he died.

It was dawn. David Drennen and Ygerne Bellaire standing silent, head bowed over the still form upon the bear skin, knew in their hearts that there had been no tragedy wrought here. The lips turned up to them were smiling. The man had died full of years, honoured in their hearts, loved deeply. He had grown weary at the end of a long trail and his rest had come to him as he wanted it.

They did not see Ramon Garcia who came

softly to the door. For a moment he stood looking in, seeing only the girl; slowly there welled up into his soft eyes great tears. From his breast he took a little faded bunch of field flowers. He raised them to his lips; for a second, holding them there, he knelt, his eyes still alone for Ygerne. Then he rose and crossed himself and went away.

They had not seen. But in a little they heard his voice as he rode down into the cañon. It was the old song, lilted tenderly, the voice seeming young and gay and untroubled:

"*Dios.* It is sweet to be young . . . and to love."

CHAPTER XXV

THE BELATED DAWN

AT last they passed out of the thick shadows which lay in the forest lands and into the soft dawn light of the valley, Ygerne and David, riding side by side. Behind them lay the hard trails which separately each had travelled; before them now had the two trails merged, running pleasantly into one; behind them, far back in the lonely solitudes of the mountains, was the old Château Bellaire wrapped about in its own history as in a cloak of sable; in front of them, dozing upon the river banks, was MacLeod's Settlement.

They were thoughtful-eyed, thoughtful-souled, their lips silent, their hearts eloquent, as they rode through the quiet street, passing Père Marquette's, Joe's, finally coming abreast of Drennen's old dugout. Drennen drew rein as Ygerne stopped her horse. Her eyes went to the rude cabin, its door open now as it used to be so often even when Drennen had lived there. Then she turned back from the house to the man and he

saw that tears had gathered in the sweet grey depths and were spilling over.

It was the time of rich, deep midsummer in the North Woods which had brought them back to the Settlement on their way to Lebarge. It was the season of joy come again, the warm, tender joy of infinite love.

A certain thought, being framed upon Drennen's lips, was left unspoken because to the girl the same thought had come and she had spoken swiftly after her own impulsive way:

"You asked me to meet you once . . . at dawn," she said softly. "Do you remember? And, instead of coming, I left you a note which I could not have written . . . if I had not been mad . . ."

"That is gone by now, Ygerne," he answered gently.

"But," she whispered, "the dawn has come!"

So at last they came to the old log where Drennen had come upon her that day he had hurled his love at her like a curse.

The flash of blue across the Little MacLeod might have been the wing of the same blue bird that had called to them here so long ago. A winter had come, had wrought its changes upon the earth and had gone; now it was a deeper summertime; but, for all that, to-day might have been the day set apart for this belated lovers' meeting.

Out of the thick darkness at last into the rosy dawn. Sorrow and tragedy behind, covered deep in those shadows; love in front of them and all that it promises to the man and the woman.

Ygerne slipped from her horse and went straight to the log, perching upon it as she had sat that other day. Drennen, in a moment, followered her.

"Ygerne," he whispered.

Everything forgotten but the Now, a thrill ran through the girl. She lifted her eyes to his and smiled at him, holding out her arms. But, in spite of her, her heart was beating wildly, the blood was running into her face until her cheeks were stained, red and hot with it.

"Do you hate me . . . because I made you love me?" she asked, laughing a little, holding him back from her for the last deliciously shy second.

"Do you hate me, Ygerne, because always I was brute to you?"

Then she no longer made play at pressing him back from her.

"We must begin all over," she said at last. "Love is not love which does not trust to the uttermost. We both have lacked faith, David, dear. No matter what we see with our own eyes, hear with our own ears, we must never doubt

again. You will always believe in me . . . now . . . won't you, David?

They were silent a little, busied with the same thoughts; they lived over the few meetings here; they remembered the rainbow upon the mountain flank, the dinner at Joe's Lunch Counter; they were saying good-bye to MacLeod's and were looking forward to Lebarge, the railroad and what lay for them beyond. . . .

Suddenly Drennen cried out strangely, and Ygerne, startled, looked at him wonderingly.

"What is it?" she asked quickly.

He pointed to something lying in the grass at the side of the log; just a few bits of weather spoiled cardboard which once upon a time had been a big box filled with candy for her. He told her what it was. Her hand shut down tight upon his arm; he could feel a little tremor shake her; then, deeply touched by this little thing, the girl was crying softly. A tear splashed upon his hand, a tear like a pearl.

"And there was something else, Ygerne," he said gently. "Look. The winter has left it and no man has come here to find it."

It was peeping out at him from the little hollow upon the log's uneven surface where he had dropped it, a glint of gold from under the piece of bark which he had put over it and which had not been thrust aside by the winter winds.

"I got it for you at the same time, Ygerne," he told her. "It was to be my first little present to you. . . ."

Winter snow and spring thaw had done no harm to the gold which could not rust nor to the pearls which could not tarnish. . . . Silently she bared her throat that he might fasten the pendant necklace for her. His hands trembled and a strange awkwardness came upon him. But in the end it was done.

THE END

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